JERRY LABRIOLA, M.D.

Diamonds and Pirates

A Novel

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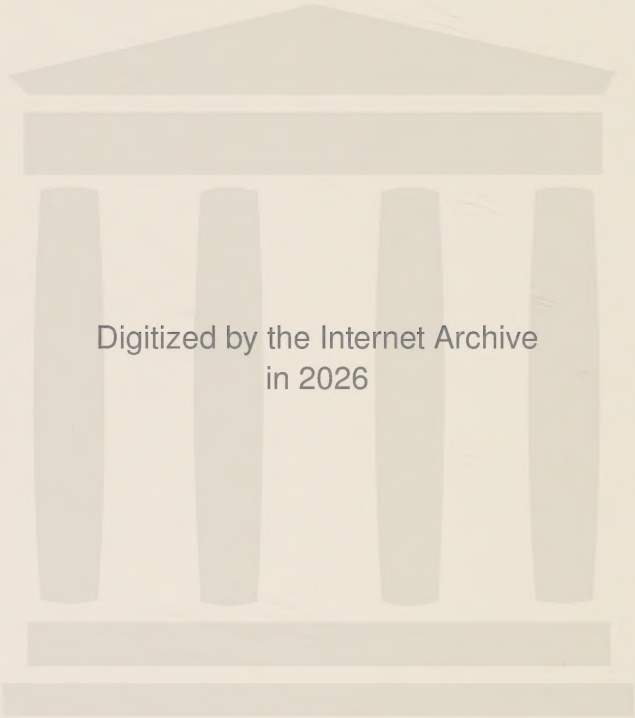
A widespread cartel of prostitution, piracy and Perónism underlies this story of international intrigue, most of which takes place in the United States, Argentina and Gibraltar, but spans the globe in its impact on the human race. Treasure hunter Paul D'Arneau is hired to locate a diamond box and to determine its relationship to such a cartel.

Unexpectedly, he finds himself embroiled in trying to prevent a Japanese-led sarin attack that would destroy the world. The New Kamakazis, among others, are constantly on his tail, requiring him to call upon his many ways of warding off assailants, not the least of which is the Atemiwaza form of jujitsu.

This absorbing mystery/suspense novel is replete with educational content in connection with the back stories of its characters and the settings in which they live.

Its climax alone is as unexpected as those characters are believable and as the entire story is gripping ... page after page.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Diamonds and Pirates

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BY

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STRONG BOOKS

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To computer mentor, Dan Uitti,
whose patience rivals his expertise.

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NOTE

I have taken the liberty of presenting nearly all dialogue in English to avoid the complexities of multiple languages versus English.

J. L.

Chapter 1

Early summer, 2014

It had been four years since Paul D'Arneau worked on behalf of *Gens de Vérité* to thwart an attack by Japanese extremists to end the world. They had planned on utilizing drones to release deadly sarin gas on thousands of cities world-wide.

A longtime treasure hunter and once a Yale professor and, later, the Director of the university's sprawling library facility, he was determined never again to answer a million dollar call from *Vérité,* a powerful French organization that had demanded too much of him. Twice. Once his primary mission had been accomplished, Leon Cassell, its president, would extend requests that he claimed were "part of the total assignment."

They terminated their relationship amicably, and Paul and his wife, Sylvie, decided to move from New Haven, Connecticut to Cape Cod, Massachusetts, once a vacationland during his teens. Not far from Boston's Logan Airport, he could easily depart for newly accepted roles around the globe.

His specialty had become locating valuable family heirlooms. Despite the traveling and time away from Sylvie, he felt it had become a calmer calling from a calmer place, not from a bustling Paris or Rome, as before.

He also increased lecturing aboard cruise ships, which he had undertaken a dozen years ago. In exchange for free voyages aboard ocean-bound vessels like the Queen Mary 2 and Norwegian Cruise Line ships, he would give talks about treasure hunting, often including forensic science to clarify issues. He had taken semiweekly classes on the science for eighteen years but gave them up when his cruise lectures multiplied.

Yet he never gave up the judo classes he'd conducted for years, believing that forensic science and jujitsu were the perfect combination. Those along with the study of international arboretums. He never explained why and no one ever pressed him on it.

His best friend, Dr. David Brooks, ran a similar martial arts class but steered clear of arboretums. "They're for sissies," he would say.

Paul declined a debate.

The phone call came on a Wednesday morning. The head of a *Vérité* rival, headquartered in Philadelphia, not France, was on the line. He said his name was Oscar Blackstone and his organization was called *Emerald Research.* He asked Paul if he'd be interested in taking on a dual job that had stymied everyone they consulted.

Paul had once heard of the organization and any interest aside, he nonetheless asked what the job entailed.

"Nothing to do with your last one, courtesy of *Vérité.* Remember? Japan, sarin, drones, the apocalypse? And salary-wise, we'll match anything they gave you. Are you currently involved in another of your escapades by any chance?"

"No, I'm between them. And I swear I'll never get involved in 'escapades' again, as you call them. Just straightforward assignments." On the surface, Paul was still disinterested, and even somewhat suspicious, yet said, "But do go on. Tell me more."

"We know why you were primarily hired and that you fulfilled that obligation in no time at

all. But then other things came along and you took them on instead of flatly refusing. *Big* mistake, incidentally. That wouldn't be the case with us, if you accept our assignment."

"I'm honored you thought of me, but what would the assignment be?"

"To locate Eva Perón's missing jewelry box. We've received estimates that its contents—many of them diamonds—are worth as much as eight-million-dollars.

"But it's not just the diamonds and their monetary worth. That's where the 'dual' comes in. We understand there's an ongoing scheme for someone to use the jewels in a scandalous way."

"Meaning?"

"To support what we're calling an international cartel of three things: prostitution, pirates and Perónism, itself. As for the latter, Eva and everything about her are more crucial to our case than is her eventual husband, Juan, who, as you know, became president of Argentina. It's like a syndicate dealing with all three. They're somehow related, but we have no idea how. Police officials and political leaders from all over call us practically every day about them, but we can't even offer a clue. We can guess, but that's not good enough to prosecute. We wouldn't expect you to

solve all of it—primarily the use of the diamonds. What do you say? Interested?"

Blackstone didn't allow time for Paul to digest what he'd just heard, much less to offer a response.

"Even if you can't say over the phone, perhaps we can meet somewhere to discuss it further. I'd be willing to meet you on the Cape."

"You would come here?" Paul asked.

"Yes, I would."

"When?"

"You name it."

Paul couldn't help but be impressed which, in turn, kindled a spark of interest in the deal under question.

"Okay then. Does tomorrow fit into your schedule?" he asked.

"I'll *make* it fit in."

"Understand though," Paul cautioned, "this doesn't necessarily mean I accept the assignment. It's just to talk further about it."

"Understood."

"Good. Well, first of all, have you ever visited the Cape?"

"Many times. Usually in and around Hyannis, but not recently."

"You'll be driving here?"

"No. I have my own helicopter and can land at the Barnstable Municipal Airport. Then downtown Hyannis is about a mile south of it. Say around one?"

A helicopter of his own?

"Pretty ideal … ah … Oscar. I may call you that?"

"Certainly. 'Paul' and 'Oscar', whether you agree to work with us or not."

"Fine. At one tomorrow. Rain or shine. I'll meet you at Quincy's Restaurant, right on Main Street, Hyannis. It's a new one … opened about six months ago and it's already developed a reputation for serving the best clam chowder on the Cape.

"Sylvie and I live in Falmouth, over near The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. That's where she works now. After getting her hands dirty in all varieties of lab work in France, she eventually became an administrator of sorts at the Academy of Sciences in Paris. That's the same kind of responsibility she has at Woods Hole—an administrator of the Institute, the Marine Biological Laboratory, and the Research Center. All three."

"She also consults for the Geodetic Survey Division and The U.S. Bureau of Fisheries. You know: once a scientist, always a scientist. And she loves it.

"But about every seven to ten days … if I'm not off somewhere … we drive into Hyannis to eat at Quincy's."

Late that afternoon, Sylvie arrived home to a husband she found pacing around the house. He stopped to relate every aspect of the phone call as she listened intently. Her only comments were a question and a warning: "Another million dollars?" and "Be careful."

"Yeah, another million. Adding up. We have no kids or close family so maybe we can eventually donate some to charity. I mean something substantial."

"A charity like what?"

"Oh, the *Wounded Warrior Project.* Or maybe start some kind of million dollar program at the local community college—Yale certainly doesn't need the dough. One that helps needy students. It could be in *your* name."

"Mine? You do all the work, not me."

"But so many of the programs are named for men. I'd like one for a woman for a change. Besides, you're my alter ego, my sidekick. I can see it now in the local paper."

He spread out a hand before him, signifying a headline, and said in a deep voice: "Sylvie

D'Arneau Program Initiated at Falmouth Community College."

"*Really,* darling."

"Okay, okay. Only wanted you to know how I feel about women."

Sylvie tilted her head to the side and eyed him up and down. "Specific women?" she asked.

"No, just women in general."

The next day, Paul read the fierce rain as ominous. It had come in full measure and had not let up as he pulled into Quincy's side parking area.

Remarkably, as he opened his car door and was about to raise his umbrella, a taxi pulled in nearby. It bore a tall, slightly slouched man who paid the driver, pulled up the collar of his raincoat, waved before he exited the taxi, and without an umbrella, rushed over to extend his hand to Paul's. The force of their handshake was about equal.

"You *are* Oscar, I hope," Paul said.

"Yes, and I needn't ask if you're Paul. I've seen your picture in countless newspapers over the years. Plus, as you might expect, we've researched you to the umpteenth degree … as we have your wife, Sylvie."

"That's impressive preparation. Let's go in and dry off," Paul said.

He put his arm around the big man, tugging him under the umbrella. At six-two himself, his

arm needed to be raised to coincide with Oscar's waist.

"I'm not starved for food, Paul ... only to hear your response to my inquiry. Have you come to one overnight?"

"Not at all. I need more particulars."

Oscar removed his raincoat and hung it in a nearby closet. Paul followed close behind, hanging up a red rain jacket with an adjustable hood. Underneath was a solid tan sweater over just a tee shirt. Within seconds, he retrieved the red jacket, saying, "I'm cold without it."

Paul signaled for Rita, his favorite waitress there. He asked that they be seated in his usual spot—not in the crowded main dining area—but in a booth near the left end of a bar that spanned nearly the entire room and was curved at both ends. The space from the bar to the shelves behind it was recessed, allowing customers to view hundreds of liquor bottles at eye level. Three scurrying bartenders worked without speaking.

The owner and the head bartender could never explain why Paul's favorite booth didn't absorb as much sound as the others. Paul once pointed out that the carpeting was thicker in that area and suggested that the whole restaurant be furnished the same way.

"Wouldn't be as noisy throughout the place, Harold," he advised the owner.

The lighting was on the dim side, but the many pictures of the Cape that filled most of the wall space were easy to make out—pictures of sand castles on Nauset Beach, saltbox houses fronted by picket fences, Chatham's trinket shops, Truro's famous lighthouse, the go-cart track in Harwichport, even the seagulls in Provincetown.

They sat, observed one another for a few moments, and as soon as Paul slid his satchel between his legs, Oscar broke the ice.

"I had a sandwich up at the airport right after landing, so I think I'll just have a crock of that clam chowder."

"And I'll have the chowder plus a BLT," Paul said.

Rita came by and they placed their orders, but Paul asked that they not be served for fifteen or twenty minutes.

"So ..." Oscar said, "... where should I start?" His hardly noticeable trembling hands belied a calm voice. But Paul noticed.

The tall man—Paul guessed he was in his mid-sixties—ran his fingers through soaked graying hair which was parted in the middle. He then used a single finger to press on a small black mustache that had either been dyed or had not yet

caught up to his hair color. Clear-eyed and recently shaven, his smile was warm and sincere, a slight gap between his central incisors seeming to add to the perception. He wore a blue blazer and a dotted light blue tie and white shirt. A matching blue handkerchief was triangulated in his left chest pocket. He smelled of either cigarette or cigar smoke and Paul referred to it in a tactful way.

"Sorry for that," Oscar said. "I hardly inhale, if at all. I use a cigarillo as a pointer really ... pointing at this, pointing at that. If I could write with one, I would."

"And I'm sorry I didn't dress better," Paul said. "You know—jacket, tie and all. Like you did."

"No problem. This is just habit with me, dealing with clients of all types. Incidentally, your newspaper photos don't do you justice at all."

"Well, thanks for the compliment."

As a fifty-year-old, Paul's wavy dark hair showed no signs of aging yet, nor did his body as a whole. Generally trim, its upper half looked muscular and powerful—even clothed as he was—no doubt a result of all the training required for a freestyler on the Yale swimming team years before, as well as the judo classes he faithfully ran when in town. He was stingy with smiles, preferring laughs of all degrees, depending on the circumstances.

Sylvie once commented on such a tendency, to which Paul responded, "I want them to *hear* me smile. Did you ever consider they may not be looking at me?"

But it was his dark brown eyes that caught the attention of most people with whom he was conversing—never wandering, almost penetrating, like a cat observing a thin line of moving weeds.

"So I'll start with prostitution," Oscar said. "And this brings up the name of Marlene Kesler."

Paul nearly fell off his chair. "Did you say 'Marlene'?"

"Yes. You know her?"

"I had to deal with her during my last assignment. She's nothing more than a courtesan."

"A what?" Oscar asked, his brow deeply furrowed.

"Courtesan. That's a high-level whore. In her case, an *international* high-level whore. Have you ever met her?"

"Once. Non-professionally, of course. I was in a Buenos Aires night club about two months ago, gathering up information about the 3 P's we'll soon be discussing. I attended a reception there and was introduced to her. We chatted briefly and I do remember she seemed to edge closer to me the longer she talked. I say 'talked'; it was more like 'breathed'."

"Tall, well-endowed, pretty?"

"Very."

"That's her alright. So she's resurfaced. Any idea what she's up to?"

"A guy I trust down there calls her the *Diamond Queen*. That's because she demands payment for her services only with a single diamond. And the client has to provide proof that it's valued at five-hundred-dollars, minimum. That amount for two hour's worth of pleasure. Any way he wants. She's on call regularly, five days a week. One of our staff told me she occasionally performs in Germany and in Amsterdam. But most of the time she's in Buenos Aires or with the so-called 'New Kamikazes' in Japan."

Paul's mind was still on the diamond issue and hardly heard what Oscar said next.

"And as long as I've mentioned Japan again, I might as well bring up a guy you know all about … I'm sure of that. Shoko Asahara. Remember him? He's still around gathering up more support for his feeling that the world should end. As **we** know it anyway. He and his followers have a different idea of it. Somehow they themselves would survive."

"Strange … that diamond thing," Paul said.

Oscar must have felt that the moment wasn't right to discuss Asahara so he switched back to Marlene.

"She claims that's how Eva got paid for all her dalliances, in addition to being given political advantages. We have no proof of it, but it's what she either believes or just made up."

"Made up? Why?" Paul asked.

"To convince herself she's the second coming of Evita. Maybe she's adding her take to Evita's jewelry box."

They shook their heads as if on cue.

"One other thing I learned," Oscar continued. "Providing proof of the diamond's value."

"Yes, go on."

"She has an agreement with diamond companies here and there. The client has to provide a verification note indicating its worth."

Paul leaned back and rubbed what he called his "decision scar", an old linear wound on the undersurface of his chin. It was a habit he resorted to—like pacing around the rooms of his home or munching on crackers—whenever he felt challenged or otherwise disturbed.

"You know specifically where the companies are located?" he asked.

"Yes. Scattered around the U.S."

"So that way she has contact with our country."

"Yes, for certain. By mail anyway. She'll take a diamond ahead of their … their … okay, let's be honest … ahead of their screwing—making them wait before they do, and then notifying the client that he passed the test."

"Jeez! What a complicated business deal. You'd think her clients would lose interest while they were waiting."

"Oh no. I'm told that men line up with a two-week-old verification note in their hand."

Paul nodded pensively and said, "That's her from what I remember. I can understand it, but it's unbelievable. She wants to collect diamonds like the ones Eva apparently collected! But why hasn't she been arrested? I know prostitution's legal down in Buenos Aires, but you'd think the police would consider this unusual if not psychotic."

"The only thing we can figure is that the police get paid off the same way—minus the diamond. 'No diamond needed … just keep your mouth shut'. And an odd thing I must point out: We keep tabs on her, but ever since she and I talked two months ago, no one has seen her."

"She's too busy."

"But not after dusk and not on weekends."

"Needs her rest."

Chapter 2

"That's enough about that for now," Oscar said. "Let's switch to the jewelry box."

"Wait though," Paul retorted, raising his hand like a traffic cop. "Her prostitution is the first P. What am I supposed to do about it?"

"Somehow put a stop to it. Or tell *us* how. We've tried, with no success—and now, we can't even locate her. You see, what bothers the police and political leaders is that most of their underlings are smitten with her and what she can provide them. It's as if they're in a daze and aren't doing their work as efficiently as they were before they came across her. And not one of them is talking."

"Have they questioned her?"

"Plenty of times, but do you think she'd admit to anything like captivating squad after squad of police officers? Or some authority figures? 'Gaining control' is probably a better way of putting it. I'm saying that what she's doing is mimicking how Eva got to where she got, but once again, it's only a guess.

"The important thing here is that Marlene thinks it was how Eva behaved. Between you and me, I think the beloved Eva enticed and seduced to a certain extent, but she didn't go as far as the … as the Diamond Queen."

"Agreed. And you say she's disappeared?"

"I wouldn't go that far. It's just that no one can find out where she's operating from, and the families of certain men say their husbands or fathers are gone for long periods of time."

"So here we go again," Paul said grudgingly. "I'd have to travel more than I want to."

Oscar made an imploring half-smile and said, "Now's the best time to say what I was saving for later. I've been told that the traveling you did for *Vérité* was compressed."

"'Compressed'? What's that supposed to mean?"

"They wanted you to go from place to place as fast as you could."

"That's a good way to describe it. It's true, come to think of it. Yeah, it's true. I was an idiot. It's a wonder I didn't have a breakdown."

"Well, for us, I'm sure some traveling will be necessary. Maybe not, yet I wouldn't bet on it. But if you have to, take your time. We wouldn't expect you to break records. No deadlines … I promise you that."

Paul had been listening as if three-eared, then quickly switched to a different aspect of the issue.

"Oscar … how's this sound? I somehow find Marline and arrange for her to have a female friend who can manage her schedule and what-not, but serve as a secret informant for me. I did this once before—not with a slut—but with a crooked businessman, and it helped solve the case. He was hoarding heirlooms."

"May I jump to a conclusion?" Oscar asked. "No, not 'jump' but 'leap'?" He didn't allow time for an answer. "You're saying you accept the assignment?"

"Yeah, I'll do it."

Oscar knocked over a glass while reaching for Paul's hand across the table.

"But just for clarification," Paul said, "I understand finding the diamond box, but why do

you need me to delve into prostitution? Why not just have the authorities do it?"

"Because, as you said before, it's legal down there and no one will squeal or they get cut off from what she does for them—or *to* them—or both."

"Hard to believe."

"But that's what would happen. Would we offer a million dollars if we thought for a second that it wouldn't? Your working undercover is the only way out. That's why I liked what you said about using a female informant."

Paul looked distracted for a moment and then said, "Wait! I just thought of something. Maybe I can have one of our histarians become the informant."

"You mean 'historian'?

"No, 'histarian', with an 'a'."

"What on earth are they?"

"You mean to tell me you've researched Sylvie and me to a fare-thee-well—and you never came across 'histarians'?"

"No, afraid not. Who are they?"

"They'd been after my joining them forever and when I finally relented about three years ago—thank God I did—they issued an explanatory card which I always keep tucked in my wallet. Every once in awhile, I read it because it either brightens

my day or reinforces my confidence if I'm thinking of consulting with one or more of them. As you'll soon discover, I tend to keep copies of important old records either in my wallet, my small schedule book, or somewhere in my satchel."

He reached down and patted the satchel while saying, "I consider this my traveling companion. Amazing what I find in there."

He then reached into his back pocket, removed his wallet and unfolded a card.

"This isn't meant for publication," he said, "but here, let me read it to you:

> Histarians are individuals, male or female, who are located in practically every region of the civilized world and can provide information that cannot be gotten any other way ... very few people know of their existence. They give out facts only to other histarians or to those who come highly recommended ... very often they provide insights that are contrary to what history has recorded so they are properly named. Not "contrarians" but "histarians."
>
> And most of them like to remain anonymous. They never offer a definitive opinion without first checking with others of their kind ... they are constantly doing

so … that is checking or verifying … in addition to delving into things with their own critical eye.

Some claim they have mystical powers but they have nothing of the sort … they simply do exhaustive research … "private collections from private collectors" they call it. Their information sources are never revealed but their conclusions always turn out to be right. It's superfluous to say … but totally right and totally accurate.

They have sort of a code they live by … "canon" might be a better word: "Never give out information unless you'd die over its accuracy." So they rely on solid facts, not on opinion … although they will express an opinion of other histarians, usually more than three or four. Four is the general rule.

Finally, they have all sworn never to give out much by telephone or over the Internet … only in person.

"Believe me, Oscar, every one of them I've ever dealt with has a way of insinuating himself or herself into people's lives before they realize what's going on. *Perfect* for a Marlene informant.

"In fact, I have the perfect one already in mind. Name's Sousa. Dolores Sousa. Lives right in Buenos Aires. Somehow I—or my friend, its police chief—can arrange for them to meet and then Dolores could take it from there. Or maybe I could work it the other way around. If Marlene still has that same phone number he gave me, I could alert her to a possible call from Dolores."

"But for what reason?" Oscar asked.

"Oh … maybe about helping her out … regarding … influential people—men, of course." Paul was struggling to come up with a viable answer, not only for Oscar but for himself, too. "I'll consider the pros and cons before I make a definite move," he said.

"On balance, it sounds ideal … almost supernatural—that is, the last five minutes," Oscar said. "And it's completely unrelated, but I must say that's the thickest wallet I've ever seen."

"Yeah, I have more informative cards in it than money. But back to histarians. How's this for dependability? Since I became a member, I've relied on them hundreds of times, and not once have I been misinformed. Not once. On the other hand, they've depended on *me* hundreds of times too, and after my research—if it was needed—I've never let them down either … as far as I know, or I would have heard about it.

"And my revelation wouldn't be complete if I didn't mention Thatcher Drinkwell. He's the Constable of the Police Service in St. Helena. That's an island between South America and Africa—in the middle of the South Atlantic and the place where Napoleon was finally banished and died six years later.

"Thatcher's been an histarian longer than any others I know, and absolutely the strictest. At one time, he'd never talk about anything another member waned to bring up by phone. That member would have to travel there to obtain information. The discussion would be in person, or not at all.

"I've had to travel to St. Helena more than three or four times myself. No direct flight. The Royal Air Force would fly me to Ascension Island and then I'd board a mail ship and sail for more than a day-and-a-half!

"But thank God he's changed in the past four years, at least with me. I think he feels guilty about having me travel there all those times—so now we talk freely by phone. However, sometimes he reverts to his old habits."

Paul's mouth tightened into a stubborn line. "It's amazing how Thatcher can obtain information when no one else can," he said. "I may contact him for certain things, but I'm not going to St. Helena again, that's for sure."

"I'm aware of how good that air force was to you, Paul, but rest assured, I have connections of a similar type right here on the Cape, along with other locations across our entire country."

"The one here is Joint Base Cape Cod or JBCC for short. It's home to four military command units that train for missions at home or overseas, but it also conducts airborne search and rescue missions. It just happens to be the one I call on the most and they accommodate me on a moment's notice."

He gave Paul their phone number, saying, "Here. Contact them any time. I'll tell them about you."

"Fine. Thanks. And what do they get in return?"

"I'm not at liberty to specify but let's just say they've called on us over and over to handle sensitive problems for them. Mostly secret. And we, too, act on a moment's notice."

"Hmm," Paul said with obvious detachment. "Nice relationship."

He had the distinct feeling that Oscar realized that he—Paul—wanted to get off the subject of traveling in any context.

"Yes, it is," Oscar said, "but as for your histarians, go ahead and use them as you wish … or

any other tactic you've resorted to in the past. But now for Eva Perón's jewelry box.

"We at *Emerald* have narrowed down the possibilities to three, and I'd wager you'll be shocked at one of them. First, Marlene may have it in her possession. Second, she may know who really does have it. And third—are you ready for this?—we have reason to believe that the Mob might have it!"

"The Mob? Organized criminals?"

"Yes. One of the Mafia families."

Paul made a conspiratorial gesture with his left elbow to check on his holstered pistol, then realized he hadn't brought it along.

"You mean I might have to deal with a consigliere and their under-bosses and lieutenants?" Paul asked.

"Maybe. That's all I can say at this point. Sounds like you've dealt with them before."

"Oh, yeah. Plenty of times. La Cosa Nostra. The Chinese Triads and Tongs. The Italian 'Ndrangheta. Even the Yakuza over in Japan. Sometimes as enemies and sometimes—I hate to admit to this—–sometimes as friends."

"How so, friends?"

"One syndicate counteracting another. Hard to explain, really."

"I get the picture, though."

"The thing with them … almost to the man … is their unpredictability. I'd have a case wrapped up … say … and then at the last minute, a lieutenant would do an about-face and screw up the works entirely. How do you prevent that or even correct it if it happens? You don't—pure and simple. You have to be firm at the start, nice in the middle, and firm at the end."

"Sounds like you know how to handle them."

"Question of experience, Oscar. Experience. But all in all, I've gotten along pretty well with the underworld, especially with a certain Rocco Stratta over in Calabria. He used to be one of the top commanders of the *Padrino*, the second highest level within the entire 'Ndrangheta organization. But he's mellowed somewhat and volunteered to step down a notch or two. Still has influence within the Mob though."

"How long have you known him?"

"Oh, about ten years or so. We keep in touch by phone every so often. Maybe twice a year. What we cover helps both of us in the long run."

Chapter 3

The waitress came with their food and there was near silence as they ate.

Ten minutes later, Paul said, "What say? Shall we head for Woods Hole now? I can't wait to introduce you to Sylvie. I'd like her to be in on any further conversation about my new … my new … job … shall we call it?"

"Fine. Let's go."

Paul made a quick call to Sylvie indicating he'd accepted the new assignment and that they were about to head for her office. There had been no plan to have her participate officially. She was too busy. But unofficially, he expected to keep her informed.

The only reasons for the trip, he explained, were for her and Oscar to meet one another and, in case it might be of value in his evaluation of the pirate topic, to witness what the Hole was like.

During the twenty-five-mile drive west from Hyannis, Oscar hardly said a word, deferring to Paul who spoke steadily and glowingly of the entire region. He began by apologizing for much misunderstanding of its topography.

"For instance," he said, "Falmouth is a town in Barnstable County and the county is coextensive with Cape Cod. But Falmouth also encompasses the villages of Hatchville and Waquoit, which are not census-designated locations and fall within the village of East Falmouth. Postal service makes it so."

There was no response so Paul inquired, "Clear enough?"

"Not enough, but I get the picture. Sorta."

"Well, it gets worse." He took out another card from his wallet and before reading from it, assured Oscar that it only contained key words he could glance at, even while driving. He stated he had downloaded most of them from the Internet in preparation for their ride to the Hole. He could never recite what he called a "jangle" of towns and ponds without help.

"I have the key words here in my hand and I can make it into a narration as we go along—and at a slower pace.

"Falmouth's topography," he continued, "is not unlike the rest of the Cape's. A slew of small ponds, creeks, inlets and rocky beachfronts. Its southern shore has a series of rivers and ponds, one right after the other. They include what I'd label a west to east potpourri: Inner Harbor, Little Pond, Great Pond, Green Pond, Bourne's Pond, Eel Pond, and Waquoit Bay.

"The Buzzards Bay side of the town is mainly bays divided by necks and peninsulas. They're connected to land by isthmi. The largest inlet is Megansett Cove along the Bourne town line. The Buzzards Bay shore is dotted by numerous hamlets such as, from north to south, Megansett, New Silver Beach, Old Silver, Chappaquoit, Sippewisset, Quissett and finally, Woods Hole.

"Then there's Juniper Point, the most eastern point of the Hole in Falmouth."

Oscar was almost as breathless as Paul, but he did manage, "So your wife's a creature of the sea, really."

"That's about right," Paul said. "Don't tell her I said this but one of her distant relatives might

have been a fish. Maybe a shark. Tough and sharp."

Sylvie's office was an ordinary room in the Marine Biological section of the Hole. Even less than ordinary, at her insistence. No fancy furniture, flower pots or pictures on the walls. Just her desk and leather chair along with a half dozen straight-backed chairs plus a small table equipped with a hotplate and the essentials for brewing coffee or tea. At one corner of her desk were the wireless parts of a Visaplex two-way intercom system.

Paul had once pointed to it and asked, "If you happen to leave on the control switch, can people hear your conversations?"

"If it's the main switch—yes, from all over the place. It works both ways though. If they're not careful, I can hear parts of theirs. I say 'parts' because there's so much static at my end. And determining what I hear and where it's coming from is tough. But secrets are few and far between around here."

"Nevertheless, my dear, please be careful. Make sure it's in the off position unless you have something to say to a specific office. Or to the whole Biological Section."

Sylvie's grin was taut. "I only speak to one office at a time, rarely to the whole place at once. But thanks for the advice, my darling."

A small bookcase in one corner contained a pile of about six books, but there was an enormously stocked library across the hall.

And on the inner side of her door was a bulletin which Sylvie had once framed and hung. Paul insisted that Oscar read it after they had met with Sylvie and then were about to leave her office.

Nearing the office, it took Paul about a minute to describe it, explaining that she shared his own approach, one symbolic of most situations: "Start low, aim high, end higher."

"And it applies even to her office?" Oscar asked.

"More."

"How so?"

"I know it might sound crazy, but the answer is because at any time, her requests are honored. Why waste one on the size of your office? Believe me, it works."

"I see," Oscar said. "But, you know, Paul, isn't it ironic that one of the P's … let's make it '*your* P's' from now on … is 'piracy' and that her work centers on marine life primarily?"

"Yeah, and to tell the truth, it played a part in my going along with accepting your request."

A three minute silence ensued before Oscar broke it with, "Tell me a little more about the place. Is she the top administrator?"

"No. *One* of the top, but everyone seems to kowtow to her. Personally, I think she runs the whole operation."

"That's 'operations', isn't it?"

"That it is, but I didn't want to sound as if I'm bragging," Paul responded.

"We're talking 'her', not 'you'. Whoops! I didn't mean to make it sound so harsh, Paul."

"It's okay. No problem."

As if to cover up the subject, Oscar asked if Paul would elaborate on the Woods Hole Lab.

"Since Sylvie started there, I've been asked that over and over again and could probably say this in my sleep, but you asked for it. It's a facility that occupies three or four acres on Vineyard Sound and houses both the Research Divisions and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. On top of that, the lab is where the Operations, Management and Information staff are located."

"So it sounds like the lab is where all the action takes place," Oscar said.

"I wouldn't put it exactly that way, but, yes, I suppose it's kinda the hub of the place."

Once they entered Hole territory, Paul slowed down as he maneuvered the roadways, increasing his comments about the trio of P's that Oscar had mentioned. He exchanged knowing nods with each uniformed guard at each checkpoint

booth, never required to display his plastic identification card.

For the first time, he offered a general statement about each of the P's:

"*Prostitution* requires finding Marlene to see precisely what she's up to. It's got to be more than collecting diamonds and mimicking Evita."

"*Pirates*? Well, I assume that's where this place comes into play primarily. This place plus oceanography as a whole."

"*Perónism*? That's better expressed as *Evitaism*. At least to begin with. I think it's Eva that matters more, not her husband. And it's Eva I know more about—even published a collection of stories about her a while ago. Fascinating woman."

Oscar asked him to amplify on oceanography.

"This, too, I know inside out, mainly because of my experience aboard cruise ships … been all over the world in them, several times over. Since it's a branch of Earth science that studies the ocean, I prefer calling it *marine science*. It boils down to many topics, like marine organisms, ocean currents, waves and the geology of the sea floor."

"And you've written about them too?"

"Of course. In terms of the pirate part, it's not only the science that'll be helpful, but also the cruise ship experience.

"I can remember, for example, quite a few encounters with sea pirates all over the place. Practically anywhere there's water. And sometimes it's more complicated than advertised. What I mean is that the pirates aren't always aggressive but they become so dependent on how a huge ship reacts.

"Understand ... I'm not defending pirates here, but often, they're just fishing to make a living ... and to eat ... and they're confronted ... well, let's save this for later."

Oscar looked at Paul quizzically before the subject was changed.

"Besides," Paul said, "that's just part of the task ahead. I'm hired to see how the 3 P's are interconnected."

Sylvie's building was the deepest in a cul-de-sac. It was almost hidden by trees. As they climbed four steps leading to the front door, it opened wide, and they were greeted by Sylvie who ushered them in. She gave Paul a peck on the forehead and then shook Oscar's hand. There was no immediate conversation but their friendly grins competed with one another.

"What were you doing, Syl, watching for us through the window?"

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I was passing by it when I saw your car pull up."

She turned her attention to Oscar. "So this is your new employer?" she asked. "Very happy to meet you, Mr. Blackstone."

"That's Oscar and you'll be Sylvie … right, Mrs. D'Arneau?"

Paul laughed resoundingly.

"Why the laugh?" she asked.

"Don't you remember? People not looking at me can't see my smile. So I laugh. It's comparable to hearing me smile."

As Sylvie led them in and they sat on chairs she arranged in a circle, she addressed Oscar. "Please forgive his sense of humor. You'll get used to it."

"Don't worry, Sylvie. I've heard about it from several different sources."

She was the last to sit, but while standing, she looked taller than her five feet, even to Paul. Maybe it was the clothes: loose tan slacks, matching full blouse under a brown unbuttoned blazer with pens and pencils protruding from its breast pockets, and black ballet flats with thickened heels. Stunning overall, she had green eyes that rarely blinked, flawless skin and a punishing smile that took shape slowly. Yet it was a mole that captured most observers' attention, a tiny round beauty spot at the vermilion border of her upper lip. Her left hand was most active, either pushing back

strands of straight raven hair or fingering a silver cross that hung from her neck.

Paul changed positions in his chair and said, "Well now, we're not here to discuss my responsibilities, only for you two to meet each other and for Syl to hear, firsthand, about what I'm expected to do—in the least amount of time, with the least amount of travel."

"Wait, Paul … if I might interrupt," Oscar said. "Never hurry. And travel only if absolutely necessary."

"You're right. Okay, I already have a rough plan in my mind about handling each of the P's. That is, how to proceed. A schedule of sorts.

"What will take more doing, and I haven't spent much time on this yet—is how they're related. But I'm confident that will become obvious once I tackle them, one at a time."

"And I'm glad it's he and not me who'll be handling all of this," Sylvie said.

"But you'll chip in, I hope," Oscar responded, "especially with the piracy part."

"Certainly. I'll do whatever I can. But Paul's expected to find out how they're all tied together?"

"Good way of putting it, Sylvie. But as part of it all, we're asking Paul to locate Evita's jewelry box—worth millions in diamonds. And the reason is—I mean not their worth but verifying how the

diamonds are used—presumably to support what I've labeled 'an international cartel' of obligations. They're definitely related but *how* is the question."

The phone had rung three times and on each occasion Sylvie told the caller to phone back in a few minutes. Paul, and no doubt Oscar, sensed her frustration.

Both rose. Handshakes and thanks were warmly exchanged, and the men turned to leave.

Oscar approached the framed bulletin before opening the door. It read:

> *Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.*
> *John 7:38*
>
> By this, Jesus means the Holy Spirit. The imagery we normally use for the Holy Spirit is a dove or a flame—things we think of as external to ourselves.
>
> But in this, he uses an image that is internal: streams of living water that flow from us.
>
> I wonder if that's what he meant when he spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well: "If you knew who it was who asked

you ... he would have given you living water."

Here is the result of our faith, not just that we are changed or blessed or saved, or even just that the Holy Spirit inhabits us as a temple, but that God's blessing to us overflows and constantly flows outward in a cleansing stream to the world around us.

I pray you can see that gift in your lives today.

Oscar didn't turn around immediately, instead reread segments of the words before him. Both Sylvie and Paul remained silent as if that was what was called for.

Then Oscar murmered, "Very moving."

Paul didn't hesitate. "Moving, concise, *and religious,"* he said.

As they left the building, two shots rang out and Oscar fell to the ground. Paul ducked his head, dropped to a prone position and scrabbled to Oscar's side, all the while checking their immediate surroundings.

He felt Oscar's pulse and found it regular and strong. He then removed his jacket, folded it into a bundle and gently wedged it under Oscar's head.

Sylvie dashed to the site from her office. "Were those gun shots?" she screamed.

"Yeah, so get down on your knees and crawl back inside," Paul said, his voice uneven, his gaze frozen on a black Citroen speeding away.

"Listen, that car may double back, so stay put. Better still, lie down."

Oscar began to roll around freely and trembled, "It's only my left shoulder. I hardly felt it, and see—there's no blood and I can move it fine."

"Thank the Lord!" Sylvie exclaimed.

Paul eyed the car, which disappeared within moments. *So someone knew we were here. I thought we were through with this kinda thing. Not a chance, I guess. But why shoot at Oscar? Is there more to his background than he's let on? And what's Emerald getting out of this anyway?*

He recollected the several shooting incidents during his life's work—in Holland and Singapore and Nova Scotia. He could still hear the victims insisting they weren't badly hurt. But two of them died shortly thereafter.

He helped Oscar to his feet as he muttered half a familiar prayer, then searched around and found no spent shells lying in the gutter or on the walkway.

All three drove to the Hole's medical facility where a doctor confirmed that the shoulder was only grazed and proceeded to cleanse and disinfect a superficial wound.

"But I'm afraid I'll have to report this to the police," he said.

"Really?" Sylvie responded. "They'll detain us plenty, even though it might have been a case of mistaken identity. No matter, why not let *me* do it?"

After some jockeying back and forth, Sylvie finally prevailed. But, with Paul and Oscar's approval, she never did follow through.

Oscar appeared to be the least emotionally traumatized and even refused to wear a sling. "Well, folks, we'll certainly remember my first visit here," he said.

"And speaking of remembering, that Citroen reminds me of the one that greeted me in Paris four years ago," Paul added.

"Could they have been aiming at *you* instead of Oscar?" Sylvie asked.

"Maybe. We were near each other at the time."

Before Paul closed the car door on her side, he leaned over to whisper in her ear: "Still a marked man after all these years. But if so, who's doing the marking?"

Sylvie stammered nervously in asking to be returned to her office. He did so.

Paul then drove Oscar back to his helicopter. On the way, most of their sparse conversation was a succession of questions. And nothing even resembling an answer. The most benefit Paul received from the ride to the airport amounted to an observation that Oscar was doing more heavy thinking than he was.

Alone, Paul pulled the car over to the side of a quiet road, removed a notepad from his satchel and wrote down some notes about the past forty-eight hours.

It was about six p.m. when he eventually pulled into the driveway at 88 Crest Lane. Sylvie had not yet arrived home. He wondered if they should have asked Oscar to stay over for the night, reasonably certain he would have liked their home and its surroundings. As for dinner, that was a different story. Neither Paul nor Sylvie was fond of cooking and it showed. But they could have "sent out" for a decent meal.

Their grounds were the envy of the neighborhood. They wanted it that way and paid plenty for it, a professional team tending to its maintenance on a regular basis.

Four men showed up twice weekly, more often if new plantings or a different arrangement were desired or necessary. For in New England, consideration had to be given to extreme changes in weather throughout the entire year. But at that particular time—early summer—even Paul was drawn to pause between driveway and front door to admire the property, including the house itself.

There was very little front lawn per se. Once new arborists had been hired, a grass path was its only remainder and led to a bench at the side of the yard.

More toward the front—where Paul was standing—creeping ground covers obscured the edges of a sidewalk leading to the front door.

Off to the right, a stone fountain was partially hidden among ornamental grasses and purple-flowered Persian mint. Its scent hung lightly in the air.

Off to the left, a garden contained shrubs with bright colored foliage, evergreens and bold-leafed New Zealand flax. In between were plants of different shapes and textures, including a preponderance of sea holly and arching leaves that contrasted sharply with the sword-shaped leaves of the flax.

As for their five-year-old house, they had purchased it on the open market a year after it was

built, but it closely matched most of the features they would have included had they built one from scratch.

It was a two-story Victorian structure that was defined by a symmetrical facade, front gables, scalloped shingles, a large bay window and pre-cut embellishments on cornice and wrap-around porch.

Inside, a large recessed living room contained a fireplace and coffered ceiling. Nearby, a medium-sized room served as both a family room and Sylvie's work space. Its kitchen boasted a breakfast bar and pantry.

Their second-floor bedroom suite included a private vanity, a corner whirlpool tub, a separate walk-in shower, a large exercise room, and a fireplace. There were two additional bedrooms across a wide hall, one of which Paul originally used as a computer room and study. But soon the larger of the two was morphed into what today might be labeled a "man cave" with an oversized oak desk and matching chair, several black metal stools, numerous floor lamps, a single Morris chair, a bar and wine cooler, several foot-friendly coffee tables, a surround-sound system, a small TV screen, and his computer, printer and copying machine.

All available wall space constituted his private library with floor-to-ceiling shelves stuffed

with hundreds and hundreds of books, old and new. Their topics ranged from astronomy to Zambia.

Once alone in the home—apparently before Sylvie had left her office—Paul summarized the visit aloud as he paced and munched on a cracker or two. He even ended up scolding himself. "There, that's that. Too bad the shooting scarred it and raised a bunch of questions. Was Oscar the intended victim? Or me? *But, damn it! Force yourself, Paul. Concentrate on what you're charged to do.*"

Sylvie's arrival was sooner than Paul had expected and coincided with what he had been thinking about Dolores Sousa, the historian he'd intended to be Marlene's assistant—but really his informant. He mentioned her to Sylvie.

"What's she do for a living?" she asked.

"Works in a department store in Buenos Aires' center town. I've met her before. Very nice. And reliable. I'll call her in a few minutes, explain the entire situation and assure her that I'll be paying her. As an historian, she'll keep her trap shut, too. We can count on that."

"You know ... I'm not quite sure what you hope to gain by using an informant."

"It's related to one of my vague feelings, Syl. Call it instinct. Sure, with Marlene we have a

courtesan and a wacky desire to mimic Evita … but is there more?"

"More of what?"

"I have no idea. That's why I'm thinking of an informant who can spend time with her, hear what's on her mind, and so forth. How and in what specific capacity … I'm not even sure of *that*. Maybe like a personal secretary or scheduler for her escapades.

"Who, where, when, how much—that sort of thing. Eventually, she might grow into becoming her confidante. She'd be relieved of a lot of detail. Just keep her body available."

"You make it sound so … so … anatomical."

"Well, that's what it is—in her world anyway."

"You really think of her as scum, don't you?"

"You could say that. What else do you call a gal who spends all her time in bed with a guy—or guys? Or on the floor? Or in a tree, for that matter?"

Chapter 4

Paul had kept in touch with his *Vérité* sidekick, Vincent Broussard. French born but with a PhD in history from Harvard, he had moved to Boston soon after their work with *Vérité* ended and began teaching a post-graduate course in history at the university.

Many times, he and Paul had outsmarted and outfought villainous sorts in countries of nearly every continent. They hadn't spoken to one another for at least two weeks and Paul decided to seek his availability again—this time with pay.

"No pay," Vincent said during the phone call. "The only thing is that I only have a couple of available days I could take off. It's my teaching

duties. But bottom line? Yes, for that limited time, I'd love to risk my life again with you."

"Excellent! Let's hope though that the life-risking is minimal."

"I doubt that'll be the case, but what haven't we faced? We could teach a course in it. Remember the time in Japan when … ah, forget it … we can reminisce later."

"Absolutely. It's what keeps our minds ready for any unexpected event."

"What is?" Vincent asked.

"Reminiscing. We've been through it all. It's like dress rehearsals."

"So what's the plan? Or more important than that—what's the job?"

Paul described the call from Oscar and what the new job entailed, to which Vincent replied, "Piece of cake."

"Hmm. Pirates? Big time prostitution? Evita again? Piece of cake? I wonder."

Vincent seemed engrossed in deep thought until he characterized what lay ahead as a three-pronged job.

"You got it. In a nutshell, Vincent, I think we should start with the missing box of diamonds. Then maybe prostitution, and end up with piracy. What say you?"

"Sounds like the most logical order."

"I know I trashed traveling four years ago, but for the diamond box, going to Buenos Aires is a must. We'll just take it easy. I got sick of constant pressure back then and, even now, thinking about it upsets my stomach."

"I remember it well."

"Police Chief Joe Gomez would be indispensable again down there. Hope he's still around and active."

"Call first."

"By all means, but we'd have to go anyway, even if he's retired. Someone had to take his place. And I haven't mentioned it yet, but … and it's a *big* but … we'll have to interact with the Mafia again."

"Whatever's necessary," Vincent said. He sounded unfazed.

Paul was surprised by Vincent's synergistic comments. And also most pleased.

"In fact, I'll put in a call right now," he said.

He did and was able to reach Gomez. They shared apologies for not keeping up with one another, and—yes—he was still on the job as Police Chief.

"I'd like to visit there again, Joe. It's about Evita and diamonds."

"Diamonds?"

"It's a long story. I'll tell you all about it in person. Let's see—today's Wednesday. Will you be there tomorrow?"

"All day. Nothing special to tend to, unless something comes up."

"Good. See you then—sometime in the early afternoon."

Paul next contacted Oscar to obtain air travel via the Joint Base Cape Cod unit. He and Vincent would leave at seven in the morning for a seven-hour flight. Oscar would arrange for the two pilots to stay at the stylish Park Plaza Buenos Aires Hotel until all business was settled.

On the way down, Paul kept referring to Buenos Aires as one of the most attractive cities he'd ever visited, and Vincent reminded him that it was the reason people often called it "The Paris of South America."

"You know Paris, Paul—better than most people except for Parisians themselves."

"Sure do. Maybe it's the Buenos Aires of Europe." Paul made as if he'd never noticed, but Vincent's face expressed "clever".

Paul gave him the once-over. "Am I imagining it?" he asked. "You look different."

Vincent was jockey-like short but with a pronounced upper body. He possessed long black

hair that was neatly combed back, gaps between his teeth, and delicate features. Yet he was impressive-looking and displayed a serene confidence in all his undertakings. Perfect for the kinds of tasks he had shared with Paul. And would share again.

"Different how?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. Maybe stronger. You work out?"

"Quite a bit, yes. Almost every day."

"That answers it then. Keep it up."

At one point, Paul opened his satchel and withdrew some papers his close friend and fellow treasure hunter, David Brooks, had given him. David's wife, Kathy, had accompanied him to the city and compiled a collection of notes about it:

> Buenos Aires is a huge and busy port. Mammoth machinery at dock to move immense containers. Some stops on tour bus. One to the Recoleta Cemetery. Amazing maze of mausoleums. Evita's body there. Also to Plaza de Mayo and Casa Rosa where she spoke from balcony. According to our guide she was loved by the poor, but hated by the rest. Symbols on pavement for bodies of soldiers. Few more stops, then to Claridge Hotel where we stayed.

Another section of town that stimulates the senses is La Boca, at mouth of Rio Plata. A former warehouse district, this section of B.A. is a bit funky, decorated with brightly painted, tin-roofed wooden houses that serve a dual role: as backdrops for local painters working on, exhibiting and selling their work, and as colorful backgrounds in the paintings themselves.

Next day took cab to Dorrengo Square in San Telmo district for delightful time. White statue/mimes, musicians, tango dancers—all in the midst of a flea market. There, among plenty of pricey junk, are antique treasures, many made and purchased in Europe before the 1940s.

Still another architectural masterpiece linked to history is the awesome Teatro Colón where, for instance, Maria Callas and Enrico Caruso appeared repeatedly. Outstanding acoustically and famous for opera, it is also an architectural incongruity. The building is Italianate, but the decor is French. The auditorium

imitates a scintillating wedding cake, done in red velvet.

We read a circular that said it all: "In a compliment to both cities, Buenos Aires is frequently dubbed the Paris of South America. The comparison stems from the decidedly European flair found in the food, the cafés and the chic boutiques. It shines out of the city's noble architectural beauty and sings from its cultural attractions. Yet look deeply into this highly polished veneer and you will find that Buenos Aires—like its signature dance, the tango— has a wild Latin passion bubbling just below its stately surface."

Paul hadn't intended to make many stops in the city this time around. He simply wanted to confer with the police chief and then to visit wherever Eva Perón's personal effects were stored.

They took a cab to Gomez's office where he gave them firm hugs in place of handshakes.

"It's been a long time," Gomez said. "Welcome back, both of you."

He was decked out in his usual uniform but had more gold and silver badges displayed than Paul remembered from his last trip there. Tall, trim

and a bit grayer at the temples, he still looked and spoke more like a Brooklynite than a South American.

"Good to see you again, Joe," Paul said as the three sat on chairs arranged facing each other. "I'll get right to the point …"

But he didn't get a chance, for Gomez interrupted him.

"Wait," he said, "I must tell you something first. I was going to phone you about ten minutes after we spoke last night but figured I'd wait since you were coming down."

Paul leaned forward, pressing his hands on his knees. "Good or bad?" he asked.

"Both, I suppose. Depends on how you look at it. But here goes: guess who called me right after we hung up last night."

"Who?"

"Marlene Kesler."

"*The* Marlene?"

"*The* Marlene. She wants to meet with me and asked about you, too."

"What did you say?"

"That I'd be happy to arrange a meeting with her, right here in my office. But before I had a chance to say anything about you—that I hadn't seen or heard from you in four years or more—she said she'd like to bring along a female friend. A

business partner, she called her. No doubt another whore. Gave her name as Velda Conklin. Born and raised in the Netherlands."

"I recall your saying you also have Marlene's phone number."

"Yes, I have it. I said I'd check my schedule and get back to her."

"Where's she living?"

"Said she moves around quite a bit."

"Did you ask her to elaborate?"

"Yes, and she said both she and ... what's her name? ... Velda ... they divide their time between Japan and down here. Sometimes they're together. Sometimes they go their separate ways."

Paul glanced at each of the others with a guarded smile and could hardly be understood as he said: "What in hell is she ... or *they* ... up to?"

"Beats me," Gomez said. "Maybe they offer a two-person act of some sort."

"Double the diamonds," Vincent remarked, then apologized.

The chief turned pensive in an ensuing thirty-second silence.

"You know," he said, "we could go on like this for hours. Why don't we just go ahead and meet with them? Are you two in a hurry?"

"Not in the least. I'd tell her it's ironic that Vincent and I happen to be here now and that

maybe the five of us can get together. Unless what she wants to say to you is strictly personal."

"I'll call right now and tell her it's a meeting at five, or no meeting at all."

"You know, Joe, I've got to be honest with you. I gave what I'm about to say a lot of thought and I'm glad now that I came to the right decision.

"At first, I decided not to fly here—asking myself: 'Why can't I just ask him to check for the diamonds and save me a trip'? But then I thought the diamond thing, Evita, our city here, and my new association with *Emerald* were important enough to discuss with you in person. Now with Marlene and her new buddy in the equation, I also get a chance to see and talk with them in person."

Gomez nodded, then rose and walked to take a seat at his desk. He picked up his phone receiver and hesitated. Then he made the call and spoke as if he were giving instructions to one of his police officers.

He concluded with, "So we'll convene here at five today. See you then."

"No problem," he said. "She was surprised it would be so soon and that the two of you would attend."

Gomez signaled the others to slide their chairs closer. "And I almost forgot. You want a pistol, Paul?"

"Yeah, as usual ... just one for my ankle will do."

The chief removed a loaded rig from his bottom desk drawer and handed it to Paul who applied it to the inner aspect of his left ankle.

At Paul's request, Gomez gave him Marlene's phone number on a scrap of paper and handed it to him.

"Thanks," Paul said. "This may come in handy."

"Now then," Gomez said, "I've been dying to hear about Evita and diamonds. Then we can grab a quick lunch."

Paul proceeded to explain the entire diamond story; the missing box; and the prostitution, pirates and Perónism issues.

"As Vincent here pointed out to me before—and quite correctly—it's a three-pronged job and what I was hired to do is to determine how the prongs are related."

Gomez had stared at Paul the entire time. "That's a tall order," he finally said.

"So the first thing I'd like to do is to check through the items at that basement room at the Casa Rosado—like last time. There were plenty of cartons there and we didn't check all of them for the matching dagger. Remember? Its mate was used to kill Connecticut's governor."

He was referring to 2010 when his friend, Dr. David Brooks, himself a professional treasure hunter and private investigator, was probing the brutal stabbing of the governor.

That Saturday afternoon had been windy and rainy; the lighting throughout the State House was dim and flickery in some areas. The governor's slight body lay on the floor of his office directly in front of a wide-open balcony door. The ornate handle of a dagger was lodged in his upper left chest.

Paul periodically recalled how, during some winter months, he and David would often sit before a fireplace, wine glass in hand, and exchange features of their cases. It was beneficial to both, because fresh investigative tactics would often surface, or they might discover that a certain villain was the same central figure in their individual assignments.

This particular time, Dr. Brooks had dominated the conversation. He talked of Governor Radford's rise to his position with the financial help of numerous wealthy undesirables from around the world.

How he, David, had to travel to Egypt's Cairo; to southern France's Provence; to the insulated island of St. Helena; and right there—to Argentina's Buenos Aires.

How in his travels, he was often confronted by assailants along the way. Assailants hired by the undesirables and who were determined to prevent him from establishing a relationship between the personal effect's of Eva Perón and a Japanese element consumed by evil intentions.

Paul lingered on David's assailants, Evita and Japanese intentions and concluded that they coincided with his own current experience. He termed it their "incredible triple coincidence".

"Remember, you ask?" Gomez said. "How could I forget? But you're right. We checked about half of the cartons. Found all the protective stuff Evita's guards wore when she went public—guns, swords and so on—but we found no matching dagger, so we gave up the hunt. What are you looking for this time around?"

"Diamonds. I just have a hunch. I told you about Marlene and the cost of her … her … ventures. She's down this way a lot, wants to be another Evita, and who knows where she stores the diamonds?"

The chief reacted almost violently, his face reddening against his white shirt. "She's no Evita!" he bellowed.

During a measly lunch, Paul again reached into his satchel, having decided that reading

portions of an article aloud, but softly, might assist in their understanding and pursuit of Evita and her possessions. Oscar had emailed him *The Enduring Legacy of Eva Perón* by Alexander Kathryn Mosca. Though relatively old (Copyright 2001 by Kates-Boylston Publications), Paul believed it best depicted an Argentinian era, and indirectly might offer clues regarding what Marlene had in her Evita-dominated mind. Both the chief and Vincent listened attentively, rarely chewing their food.

"So I'll just extract some key parts," Paul said, "even if I don't complete all sentences. And I might even add an editorial or two:

> ... the massive crowd ... wailed plaintively ... refusing to believe that their beloved Evita ... could be gone from them forever at the age of 33. To Argentina's poor, she was thought to be saint-like ... but to the elite, she was more like Satan incarnate.
>
> She was one of the most complex, paradoxical and enigmatic woman in history, who, more than most, embodied a litany of extreme opposites—earthy/ethereal—sacred/profane—good/evil—puritanical/ promiscuous.

Fueled by a fervent desire "to be someone", a yearning stoked by a childhood of poverty and shame, she hungered for the respect and acceptance denied her as a child of illegitimacy when such a stigma held grave societal consequences.

Early on, while working as an actress, she was Eva Duarte. She met and married General Juan Perón, the future president of Argentina. As his wife, she was afforded great respect and wielded much power, a perfect position from which to avenge the many deprivations and humiliations she had suffered at the very same hands of those she now ruled.

It is difficult to reconcile the disparate Evitas that seemed to inhabit her being.

Her complicity in offering asylum to the heinous Nazis, a commiseration born more out of greed than a shared ideology, contrasted dramatically with the unabashed tenderness and utter lack of concern for her own health, when allowing a tubercular to kiss her face, or when comforting a sick or orphaned child.

Her charitable foundation granted favors for the needy and built many

hospitals. Yet, as she championed these very human causes, *her detractors point out that she simultaneously helped herself to vast sums of money and precious gems*—obviously not having a conflict of conscience and ambition.

She envisioned one day being VP on her husband's presidential ticket, a position that would enable her to satisfy her fever for power.

But then, the first signs of illness were evident in 1950 when she fainted at an official function. From that point on, uterine cancer, surgery, and radiation dominated her life, although she continued a grueling public schedule.

She died in 1952 and for the next 14 years, her well-embalmed body was transferred from place to place—including Spain. Finally, in 1976 she was entombed, without fanfare, inside the Duarte family mausoleum in the Cementerio de la Recoleta, Buenos Aires' preeminent cemetery. Her gravesite, on which a plaque is inscribed with the words, "Don't Cry for Me" in Spanish, is positioned among the most famous names in Argentina's history. It is a peculiar irony that her body now lies

eternally surrounded by the country's elite, the very people she so hated in life.

The myth of Evita persists until today, kept alive by a spate of books, a play, a movie, a song and by an enduring interest in this passionate woman who lived a short life of stunning contradictions and loomed larger then life.

The world's attention she had captured during her lifetime is now eclipsed only by the iconic status she has realized since her death.

"So?" Paul asked. "Helpful?"

The other two appeared spellbound.

Gomez shook his head violently as if to dislodge water from his ears.

"You want an immediate answer?" he asked. "An excellent article but I've got to give it some thought. All I can say now is 'fascinating lady'. And if our Marlene hopes to duplicate her in any way, shape or form, it would have to be a miracle."

"You never met Evita, did you?" Paul asked.

"Are you kidding? She died right around the time I was born."

"Would you have liked to?"

"Liked to what?"

"Meet her."

"Absolutely."

"Did she get along with the police?"

Gomez tugged at his ear and said, "You know, I'm not sure but I *think* she did. Had to keep her distance though."

"Meaning?"

"No screwing around. And can I back up a little? When you said 'liked to', you didn't mean her and me … you know …"

"Okay, that's over," Paul countered. "Time to check the cartons. Diamonds there or not?"

The chief looked as though he was anxious to say something further. Changing the subject, he said, "You must have a hundred articles in that satchel of yours. Am I right?"

"You're right. It's not only my traveling companion but also part of my brain."

"I know it's been four years but I can still see you fiddling around in it. Never looking, just feeling. Just like now. What's your secret?"

"To what?"

"To picking out exactly what you want."

"Oh, I don't know really. Just smart hands, I guess."

"And you have whatever you need in there?"

"Everything—but why this discussion?"

"It's just so fascinating. I also remember you never needing to look at your pistols. Everything with you is mainly by feel."

This time, Paul didn't know how to respond. But he finally said, "If I feel good, feel is all I need. If I feel lousy, I'm not a good feeler."

Gomez tugged at his other ear and kept quiet.

Chapter 5

With Paul and Vincent aboard, Chief Gomez drove his police car in the direction of the Pink House. Along the way, Paul peered out both side windows and twice thought he saw men staring at them when they stopped at intersections. They looked oriental but he couldn't be sure.

After the second sighting, he told the others about it.

"Not again!" Gomez exclaimed. "We had plenty of that four years ago. Don't they ever let up? What do they do, Paul—just keep following you around?"

"That's about it. Can't tell if it's the same crowd, but they look Japanese."

"Same crowd," Gomez said.

As he pulled into a rear parking lot, he asked, "This bring back memories?"

"Sure does," Paul replied. "But didn't we park out front last time?"

"Yes, but things have changed. Rosa's no longer here and the basement rooms can now be entered from the rear. Only a few officials were given keys. One opens all entrances plus all basement rooms, and at my insistence the current administration gave one to me. I really don't know why I insisted, because I've never had use for it."

"Who's Rosa?" Vincent asked as they left the car and were walking toward a single door that was enveloped in vines. Two thin cobwebs spanned the width of the door. It looked as though it hadn't been opened in years.

"Oh, I should have explained some things, Vincent. This is our Casa Rosado—the Pink House. It's our executive mansion and happens to be where the public thinks Eva Perón gave a passionate balcony speech before thousands of adoring fans who packed the Plaza de Mayo. It's where the actress, Madonna, sang, '*Don't Cry for me, Argentina*'." Neither of those things really happened except in the movie."

"And Rosa?"

Paul answered for Gomez. "She was the cranky caretaker of the basement rooms, and you

had to get a key from her to enter any of them. Now she's gone."

"Fired really," Gomez said. "Got to be too *cranky* as Paul put it."

The chief unlocked the door and all three had to bend their heads to enter.

"As I recall, there was only one large carton labeled *Eva's Personal Effects* in Spanish," Paul said. "It's in that room in the corner over there."

Gomez unlocked its door. It was a spacious room with, off to one side, space and chairs enough for meetings to be held there. Against the opposite wall was a single table that held one carton with the aforementioned label. Also scrawled in Spanish across the carton were the words, "*Not to be displayed.*"

"This is it," Paul said.

He opened the cardboard carton and sifted through the same collection of items as before: clothing, cosmetics, silverware, candles, books, photographs, medals, epaulets. But no box of diamonds.

"She must have had more of all of these things," Gomez said, "but these probably had special meaning to her."

"Damn!" Paul exclaimed. But as he replaced an article of clothing, a single round diamond dropped to the floor. He picked it up, examined it

and gently flipped it up and down in his hand, as if to get an idea of its weight. *Could be a five-hundred-dollar one.*

"Damn again," he said. "The box could have been here at one time. And if I put this together with the cobweb out there, it might have been recently."

The other two squared their shoulders.

"The cobweb?" Gomez inquired.

"Yeah. Funny about cobwebs. I made a study of them once upon a time. Fascinating stuff and one of my favorite subjects. Care to hear about it, Joe? Not you, Vincent—you already have."

"But I'd like to hear more."

"Why not?" the chief said. "First off, are they made by spiders? I once heard they weren't. That they were some kind of dust formation."

"They're *all* made by spiders, but let me explain where dust comes in."

Paul sensed that his wanting to discuss such a topic, and their wanting to listen, was an attempt to deviate from what lay ahead. To take a breather.

"Any one of them is made up of short irregular strands arranged haphazardly. One of the most common in the States is *Achaearanea tepidariorum*."

Gomez and Vincent stiffened to attention.

"And because the strands are sticky, they gather dust."

"The black widow spider also belongs to this family."

"Then we have the cellar spider, which makes loose irregular webs in dark places."

"The jumping spider is *very* interesting. It trails what's called a dragline wherever it goes, and never makes a web. But a single filament like this can get into the air stream and stick somewhere, only to attract dust."

"Now getting back to the webs that are here: if they're crisscrossed, no one's disturbed them for a long time. If it's just a single strand or two, they could have been created recently—like ten minutes before."

All three froze upon hearing muffled noises outside. Paul ran some possibilities through his mind and felt it was an old car either starting up and shifting gears or one that was coming to a nearby halt.

"You guys stay here. I'll steal a look," he whispered. He leaned over and eased toward the door. Gomez followed close by, gun drawn.

When Paul straightened up and assured them he saw nothing to worry about, the others tried hard to collect themselves while he wondered why a car was no doubt there in the first place.

They spoke among themselves about the smell of exhaust fumes, the ones he'd seen far off in the distance. And about their unanticipated and haunting situations in the past.

Gomez agreed with Paul, however, suggesting that the car's driver probably got lost.

"So let's get back to where we were," he advised. "Your conclusion about cobwebs, Paul. Incredible! So you're saying that someone could have entered here recently and stolen a box of diamonds, like the one on the floor. Even someone like Marlene?"

"Even someone like Marlene. She might have stored them here but now wanted them for a purpose. I may be assuming too much but it's the purpose that's important right now. If she's the 'someone' in the first place."

"But if she's the one, why store them here?" Vincent asked. "And where'd she get a key?"

"The key is easy," Paul answered. "Remember what she does for a living? And why store them here? Because she idolizes Evita and is trying to be just like her in every way."

"Marlene would wish all that?" the chief asked.

"All but Evita's kind of death."

Paul paused for a moment, then looked reassured as he said, "Joe, let's not waste time now,

but in the next few days could you go through the other cartons here and check for diamonds?"

"Consider it done. If I find any—or *anything* suspicious for that matter—I'll phone you."

At five o'clock, the two women arrived at the chief's office. Paul thought it proper to remind her of their previous friendship in the States—business oriented and non-sexual. Marlene seemed disinterested. He watched her every move. *In one's body language, what a difference a few years make!*

He believed that her outward appearance had changed little during the past four years. Very attractive and in her mid-thirties, she was tall, curvaceous and stylishly attired in tight fitting charcoal slacks, a similarly colored tight jersey, and gladiator sandals.

She carried an anti "it" sleek bucket bag, making sure its inside could be seen: deep purple patent-leather—contrasting with its outside "camello" natural brown hue. Her jet black hair was pulled back in a chignon and her smile appeared tantalizing if not beckoning.

Velda was shorter and looked more like a man than a woman. A handsome man, however, with hair worn in an edgy bob cut short—well above the jaw–and angled forward for movement.

Long, side-blended bangs were colored a bright blonde, in high contrast with the hair's coppery brown base. She had piercing green eyes and perfectly aligned teeth. All her clothing was loose and dark: a jacket with ornate buttons, an underlying full blouse, oversized slacks and, like Marlene, gladiator sandals.

Paul wondered if she were a transvestite and asked her directly.

"Heavens, no," she answered, her voice high-pitched and squeaky. "Would you like to check?" she snapped.

Taken aback and sorry he'd asked the question, he responded, "Only kidding."

After introductions and a brief return to past conversations between Paul and Marlene—all very formal—the women refused a seating invitation, coffee or tea.

"Sorry we can't stay long," Marlene said, "because we have an engagement that came up at the last minute, but I wanted to get something off my chest." She tossed a silver bucket bag onto a table and removed a single sheet of paper from it. "I know I can't begin without some help," she explained.

Paul had been tempted to counter with, "And what a chest it is," but held back. Instead, he asked, "How much time do you have?"

Marlene checked her wrist watch and answered, "Just a few minutes—maybe five?"

"Then go right ahead," Paul said. "Incidentally, we know all about your 'trade'—shall we call it—so you needn't go into detail about *that*."

"Alright, good," Marlene said and scanned some notes from the paper.

"What I really want to tell you is that I'd like to walk in Eva Perón's footsteps. I know, I know... I'd never be like her, but I can try. At least I can help people. Maybe more than she did, if I include the elite along with the poor. By the elite, I mean those who are well off, including business people. If it includes you-know-what from time to time, so be it. They tell me that's how Evita worked it."

Gomez nearly laughed, Vincent constricted his lips, and Paul said, "Understood. But since we have so little time, may I refer to the diamonds? And also ask where your mountain hideaway is?"

"Certainly and not certainly. If I gave away where I'm staying right now, then it wouldn't be a hideaway anymore, would it? The most I can say is that it's in the Sierra de la Ventana mountain range, southeast in the Pampas."

"Okay. About your career then. You've been doing what you're doing for a while now and you seem to charge in diamonds. Where *are* they all?"

"I kept them in boxes and periodically I'd hand them over to two other parties. Oops," she said, covering her mouth with her fingers.

Paul noticed. "Slip of the tongue?" he asked.

"You could call it that."

"What other parties?"

"Sorry, I'm not at liberty to say. Not yet anyway."

Paul felt he wouldn't receive a telling answer, yet asked, "Why not?"

"Because I might be killed."

Gomez and Vincent registered shock but Paul's face remained as blank as a judge handing down a decision.

"Didn't you have the same predicament once before?" he asked.

"When's that?"

"After your husband was murdered."

"But that was four years ago and look … I'm still here."

His name was Dr. Albert Kesler and he was found dead in his bathtub, neck slashed from ear to ear. He was the one-time head of the Division of Stem Cell Research at Hollings General Hospital but eventually his shadowy past caught up with him.

Prior to his position at Hollings, he was a scientist at the Universidad de Buenos Aires but

was run out because of some controversial articles he'd written for *La Nacion*, the city's main newspaper. He lasted there for awhile but then crowds would gather on the grounds outside his office and scream for him to be fired. His life was even threatened and that's when he suddenly disappeared.

When interviewed, the newspaper staff admitted it was always reluctant to print his material but when he, himself, did some threatening, they relented and went ahead. Paul had learned that one of Kesler's articles included his claim that Japan had felt sorry for fighting against the U.S., but that they had no choice. The reason was never cited.

Once again, Paul had resurrected some details of a previous case while thinking how singular it was that certain aspects of a current one reminded him of that other one. *I suppose crimes are crimes, but they all share so much.* At the conclusion of a resurrection, he would jerk his head from side to side to rid himself of further thoughts. As he did now, before returning to Marlene.

"So you're still here doing your same ..." Paul clamped his teeth shut.

"Yes, but I want to stop ... and I don't know how because of those arranging my contacts."

"Tell you what," Paul said. "When you're ready to let us know who those parties are, call either of us and then perhaps we can help you with your wish."

"Thank you," Marlene replied. "It won't be long, because I'm anxious … really anxious."

She took up her purse and headed for the door as if her admitting to anxiety fostered a desire to disappear. Velda followed after giving her own thanks.

"We'll be waiting," Paul yelled out toward the door they hadn't bothered to close.

He then turned to Gomez who was looking over his shoulder and said, "Christ! That was something. What's come over her? Is all this legit or is she kidding?"

"Want my honest opinion?"

"Yeah."

"Mostly legit."

"I agree, but I've got to confess: she's a changed woman, a disturbed woman. The second coming of Evita? Paranoia?"

"I sense it myself—which is what I'm sure you'd figure I'd say."

Paul, deep in thought, ignored the remark. "I can sum it up by comparing her behavior to Napoleon's in the last months of his life."

"Napoleon?"

"Remember—he was banished to St. Helena, lived there in Longwood House for about six years and *hated* it. It apparently took its toll. He became paranoid. I read about it in a book the histarian, Constable Thatcher Drinkwell, gave me and there's a section in there that I ripped out and have with me because it applies to many of the people I've had to work with. Gingerly, I should add. They're really a collection of entries to his diary, word-for-word."

"It's in your satchel, right? Seems like you store everything in there—which we talked about before."

"Yeah, in the satchel. All but the kitchen sink. Think you can stand listening to me read it? There are three parts and the last part is pretty long."

"Have you ever read a rookie police officer's report who's trying to make an impression? So yes, I'll stand it. You've got me intrigued as it is."

"I'm intrigued too, just thinking about it. Is it something we should be prepared for? As I said, she's changed so much, aiming higher and higher. Is guilt behind it?

"Regarding Napoleon, the book points out that when he talks about his conquests, you get a sense of the enormity of it all. Maybe it was just too much for one man to handle.

"It may sound ridiculous in making a comparison, but could it be that all of Marlene's affairs became too much for *her* to handle?

"Keep in mind that it's hard to tell when changes in Napoleon's mental status began and the same thing applies to Marlene—unless we're barking up the wrong tree and her status is just the result of one woman's normal course of change."

Paul fumbled through the satchel. He straightened out a slightly crumpled lump of book pages and began reading:

> Drinkwell said: Well, for the conqueror of most of Europe, nearly six years in captivity must have been pure hell. He was miserable. He apparently sat a lot, staring off into space, occasionally pounding one fist into the palm of the other. Of course, some thought he was schizophrenic even before he abdicated. And there are hints that as time wore on, he began suffering from a kind of paranoia.
>
> Here are the three entries: First we have '*A questa casa. O in quest luogo tristo, non voglio niente di lu'*:
>
> I hate this Longwood. The sight of it makes me melancholy. Let him put me in some place where there is shade, verdure,

and water. Here it either blows a furious wind, loaded with rain and fog, *che mi taglia l'anima*; or, if that is wanting, *il sole mi brucia il cervello*, through the want of shade when I go out.

Drinkwell went on: His use of Italian rather than French: is it a sign of abnormal regression? As to the second entry, I'm no psychiatrist but it strikes me as weird. You be the judge.

Man loves the supernatural. He meets deception halfway. The fact is that everything about us is a miracle. Strictly speaking, there are no phenomena, for in nature everything is a phenomenon: my existence is a phenomenon; this log that is being put in the chimney is a phenomenon; my intelligence, my faculties, are phenomena; for they all exist, yet we cannot define them.

I leave you here, and I am in Paris, entering the Opera; I bow to the spectators, I hear the acclamations, I see the actors, I hear the music. Now if I can span the space from St. Helena, why not that of the centuries? Why should I not see the future

like the past? Would the one be more extraordinary, more marvelous then the other? No, but in fact it is not so.

And the third one is exceptional—in more ways than one, Drinkwell said. The words convey such scope, such grandeur, but they can also be the words of a paranoid. The emperor was always prone to grandiose proclamations but none like this.

And note that he refers to himself not as 'I' or 'me' but as 'Napoleon'. That should raise an eyebrow, don't you think? But there's more than that. The tone of the boasting has meaning. Granted it was no doubt directed against those who would defame him, but I think there's a possibility, even a probability, the man was mad. Nuts. He wrote these in the ninth month of his confinement so I have to ask, 'Was he already deteriorating when he arrived?'

Here it is and remember: 'Napoleon, not 'I' or 'me' or 'mine':

You want to know the treasures of Napoleon? They are enormous, it is true,

but in full view. Here they are: the splendid harbour of Antwerp, that of Flushing, capable of holding the largest fleets; the docks and dykes of Dunkirk, of LeHavre, of Nice; the gigantic harbour of Cherbourg; the harbour works at Venice; the great roads from Antwerp to Amsterdam, from Mainz to Metz, from Bordeaux to Bayonne; the passes of the Simplon, of Mont Cenis, of Montgenèvre, of the Corniche, that gave four openings through the Alps; in that alone you might reckon 800 millions. The roads from the Pyrenees to the Alps, from Parma to Spezzia, from Savona to Piedmont; the bridges of Jena, of Austerlitz, of the Arts, of Sevrès, of Tours, of Lyons, of Turin, of the Isère, of the Durance, of Bordeaux, of Rouen; the canal from the Rhine to the Rhone joining the waters of Holland to the Mediterranean; the canal that joins the Scheldt and the Somme, connecting Amsterdam and Paris; that which joins the Rance and the Vilaine; the canal of Arles, of Pavia, of the Rhine; the draining of the marshes of Bourgoing, of the citentin, of Rochefort; the rebuilding of most of the churches pulled down during the Revolution, the building of new

ones; the construction of many industrial establishments for putting an end to Pauperism; the construction of the Louvre, of the public graneries, of the Bank, of the canal of the Ourcq; the water system of the city of Paris, the numerous sewers, the quays, the embellishments and monuments of that great city; the public improvements of Rome; the re-establishment of the manufactories of Lyons. Fifty millions spent on repairing and improving the Crown residences; sixty million' worth of furniture placed in the palaces of France and Holland, at Turin, at Rome; sixty millions worth of Crown diamonds, all of it the money of Napoleon; even the Regent, the only missing one of the old diamonds of the Crown of France, purchased from Berlin Jews with whom it was pledged for three millions; the Napoleon museum, valued at more than 400 million. These are monuments to confound calumny.

History will relate that all this was accomplished in the midst of continuous wars, without raising a loan, and with the public debt actually decreasing day by day.

Paul, his breathing accelerated, let thirty seconds pass before comfortably saying, "There, that's that. I hope I've made my point."

"You certainly have," Gomez responded. "I see a definite connection."

Paul signaled to Vincent while saying, "Well, we'd better be off. We certainly learned more than expected and we thank you, Joe."

"I'll drive you to the airport after I call for the pilots."

"No, no. You've given us enough of your time. We'll just taxi there, but the call for the pilots would be appreciated."

"And one other thing: if either of those gals calls you for advice, do help out but then let me know."

Not far from the chief's office building, they hailed a cab. Vincent paused to tie a shoelace and three Asian-looking men suddenly came out of nowhere and shoved Paul into an old, dilapidated cab and stuffed themselves in beside him.

Vincent signaled for another taxi and followed right behind them.

Paul instinctively tensed for a judo response but also realized he'd forgotten to return the chief's pistol, which was holstered at his ankle. No one had said a word.

As the cab headed for the northern canyons of the city, Paul inched his hand down to his ankle, whipped out the pistol and made sure the other occupants, including the driver, saw it waving their way.

"Okay," he said. "That's enough. Stop the cab, let me out and get going or this thing goes off. You're lucky I'm letting you go."

The driver complied and Paul got out just as Vincent's cab stopped behind them.

As he entered the second cab, Paul said, "Well, they know we're here, whoever 'they' are. And you know what? I caught the same exhaust smell as back at the Pink House."

"Me, too," Vincent said. "So that answers that."

Paul asked the second cab driver to turn around and return to Gomez's office, hoping he was still there. He was. Paul described what had just occurred and returned the pistol.

The verbal exchange that followed was accompanied by radiant smiles all around.

"Good thing you forgot," the chief said.

"You can say that again, although, if need be, I have other ways to handle such situations."

"The judo you've demonstrated to me, right?" Gomez asked.

"Right on the money."

"Who could they possibly have been?"

"Who knows? But they were definitely Asian."

"What do you think they had in mind?"

"I hate to imagine and I'm not sure who sent them after me. Maybe the same person who had Oscar shot at. But I lucked out again."

"Don't sell yourself short, Paul—you handled yourself well. Reacted when you had to. But I would have done both."

Each man settled in for a familiar exchange. It was as if they needed it.

"Both?" Paul asked. "Meaning?"

"Show the gun and give him a chop."

"The gun, yes. A chop, no. The car was moving—remember?"

"So give him a chop when he stopped the car. Teach him a lesson."

"Nah, probably not teachable. But back to luck … it came in when you consider I forgot to return the gun."

"But don't forget you had your judo."

Paul thought hard to come up with a smart answer. He and Gomez had often engaged in such verbal interplay, and it was usually when either one or both was stressed out.

"Right," Paul retorted. "So let's say half luck."

Gomez, it seemed, had run out of rejoinders so resorted to his usual surrender-like comment: "Hey, hey—another touché!"

Chapter 6

On the flight back to the Cape—Paul sleeping intermittently, Vincent soundly— the Marlene factor controlled Paul's thinking for the most part. Perhaps its dominant element was confusion. If she hadn't made an appearance—as brief as it was—he would have characterized her as the missing link in his entire million dollar undertaking. Such was the importance of her relationship to his overall challenge now; her showing up, in fact, reinforced his resolve to face it head-on. But he didn't understand, or even fully believe, her desire to become "another woman".

And what about Velda? Where did she fit in? An asset of some sort? Or just along for the

ride? No matter—he would still consider her another important factor.

Still, why diamonds in the first place? Are they harder to trace than paper money, and would that be the reason they were necessary for payoffs?

With a half hour to go before landing, Paul decided that for the present he had gone as far as he wanted with prostitution, diamonds and Perónism in general. And as a corollary, he would dwell on a third factor—piracy—and what to recommend about it.

This is where he would depend considerably on Sylvie and her knowledge of maritime affairs. In the distant past, she would bring up the subject from time to time, but he'd paid little attention to her comments for he was not involved. Not that he didn't want to be, for on other occasions he would beat the subject to death, usually with a similar concluding remark: "Someday you'll see. They'll call on me to solve the twists and turns of international piracy. The scope of it, the misimpressions, the handling of it, and so on."

But now, he didn't waste any time. After landing at about three a.m. and thanking Vincent, he taxied home. He managed more shut-eye without disturbing Sylvie and read a brief note from her welcoming him home. Later, at about ten, he drove to Woods Hole and burst into her office.

There, she rushed around her desk and practically jumped into his arms. "Oh darling," she cried, "thank God you're home."

"I thank Him too," he responded, kissing her over and over again. "But what's with this? You've never reacted this way before, and I've been gone for longer periods."

"I know, but I just had a funny feeling. Prostitution: how dangerous—and unsavory on top of it. Evita: loved and hated. *Really* hated. And the last thing …"

"*Pirates*," Paul said. "I know it's one of your favorite reading topics but we rarely discuss it at home. In conjunction with your job here though, have you had much experience with them—I don't mean personally of course but in conjunction with your overall responsibilities?"

"Yes, from time to time, especially when cruise ship bigwigs call to give their opinions or demand information we don't always have."

"Well, that's the next thing I'm about to come to grips with, and the more you can tell me about it, the better it'll be. You already know about some of my encounters with sea pirates because we've talked about it. But does Woods Hole have a department or division or something similar that deals with piracy?

"And let me add, Syl, I think there's much news coverage about pirate activity not only in the Somalia region but all over the place."

"Even around here … close to home," she said. "I think the local news outlets try to keep a lid on it—maybe because of cruise line pressure. And no, we don't have a group that specializes in it."

"In any event, let's go to Quincy's for dinner tonight and discuss it," Paul said. "Maybe you can brush up on whatever stuff you have lying around about it and even bring it with you."

As usual, Paul asked Rita the waitress to seat them off in a quiet corner of the restaurant and not to serve them until signaled, for they had important things to discuss first.

"But that doesn't exclude a bottle of Chardonnay," Paul added with a wink.

Sylvie started straight away. "I pieced together a montage of all the material I've saved through the years on piracy. Maybe 'montage' isn't the right word exactly because there aren't any pictures, but I guess it can apply to words alone, too. Anyway, here it is. I'll just read some of it to you. Some I got from colleagues, some from what I read here and there in libraries and on the Internet, and even some sent to me by the IMB."

"The IMB?"

"The *International Maritime Bureau*."

She ran her finger across selected sentences of the montage as she continued.

"They publish regular piracy reports listing details about names of ships attacked, consequences to the crew and ship, and actions taken by the crew and coastal authorities, if any.

"I even brought along an article that's kinda sympathetic to some pirates. It sides with you in a way, claiming that certain sea-going men are 'just trying to make a living by fishing' and they happen to come upon a cruise or cargo ship. They're automatically labeled as pirates and treated as such. I think that's the way you put it."

"That's the way."

"Also, I left out the pirates of ancient history—like Captain Kidd or Jacques de Sores or Blackbeard and so on—because I can't see how that would be of any help to you. Modern pirates act differently anyway, as you'll hear. And they definitely look different."

Again, she underlined with her finger. "They look more like 'normal' men now—normal fishermen. Gone are the stereotypical characteristics of a Caribbean pirate such as a parrot, peg leg, hook, earrings, beard or eyepatch.

"Incidentally, dear, you've told me before, but how do pirates fit into the scheme of things?"

"Fit into the scheme of things? I'm not sure yet. Not even close, but I'm leaning toward their fitting in with the Mob in some way. You name any type of criminal activity and there's the Mob. Why not piracy, too? I just can't figure out how or why."

"Well, I'm not surprised," Sylvie said. "We'll get to the bottom of it in due course."

He translated her last statement into meaning that she'd like to move to a different topic. But he wasn't certain and didn't let her, anyway.

"You know," he said, "I've always been intrigued by Mob activity. They always seem to know where to turn up."

"Everywhere," Sylvie said.

"That's correct, but how do they know when and where? And why, in the first place?"

"C'mon, dear—you're kidding, right?"

"Not at all, but let's see what you have to say about it."

Rita arrived with the wine bottle, uncorked it and began to pour a small amount for Paul to sample.

"Don't bother," Paul said. "It's our usual, right?"

"Right." The waitress filled two glasses and left.

"Let's see—where were we?" Paul asked.

"The Mob," Sylvie replied, "but let me get back to part of the montage I spent all afternoon on: piracy and the Mob."

She snapped her fingers, a move Paul disliked for he thought of it as non-feminine.

"No, wait," she said. "First my personal answer to your Mob questions. The when, where, why. They pop up in the proper places––proper for them—because they help one another. Whether it's east coast or west coast, this country or that. I know they have their differences and sometimes it's one Mob against another, but if they're non-competing over something, there's hardly ever any resentment expressed by Mob members when one crime family goes to bat for another one. I think of them as 'spread out'—spread out all over the globe, so very little that might satisfy a particular Mob is ever missed."

"Good, good." After just two quick swigs, Paul felt looser.

"Good, good? You mean that they're spread out?"

"No, silly. The wine. It's good."

"Yes, I agree, but go easy now."

Paul gave her a defiant grin.

"In any case," Sylvie said, alternating her glance between Paul and the montage, "to my way of thinking, piracy has changed drastically. There's

the old fashioned and the new fashioned. The 'Somalia-based', I call them, and the 'rest-of-the world-based'. I even have a different, maybe more descriptive way of expressing the two types: 'the current aggressive' and the 'old fashioned ones'."

Paul started taking notes, the first time he'd ever done so while listening to her. Sylvie noticed.

"This isn't a lecture, my dear," she said.

"No, but you're making more sense than most lecturers I've had to put up with in the past, including the so-called pros in college."

"Thank you, darling, but I think it's the wine more than what I'm saying."

"You haven't even tasted yours yet," Paul countered, almost belligerently.

"I'd better not. Let me get through this first. Then we'll finish off the bottle. Anyway, to go back to your reference to the Mob, modern pirates today are definitely part of organized crime gangs that target big and small cargo vessels, and even cruise ships and private yachts."

She opened up several folders she'd brought along and withdrew a few sheets that were clipped together. Paul leaned over the table and saw that some contained typed material—others, handwritten notes.

"The Internet summarized the Modern Age very well," she said, "and, as you'll soon hear, its

conclusion jibes very well with Mob activity. For example, and I quote:

> Seaborne piracy against transport vessels remains a significant issue with estimated worldwide losses of … almost 16 billion U.S. dollars per year, particularly in the waters between the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, off the coast of Somalia, and also in the Strait of Malacca and Singapore—which are used by over 50,000 commercial ships a year.
>
> In the late 2000s, the emergence of piracy off the coast of Somalia spurred a multinational effort led by the United States to patrol the waters near the Horn of Africa … and even Brazil created an anti-piracy unit on the Amazon River.
>
> In recent years, shipping companies claimed their vessels suffer from regular pirate attacks on the Serbian and Romanian stretches of the international Danube River—that is, inside the European Union's territory.

Sylvie stopped to inquire, "Shall I continue with this … this … overview?"

"Absolutely. Some of it I'm already aware of; some I'm not. For instance, I had no idea of the extent of money involved or of what you said about Brazil. But yeah, please go on."

Paul's glass of wine was nearly gone and Sylvie finally poured herself a small amount and sipped a tiny bit before continuing.

"Again, this is all taken from the Internet but it's substantiated by articles I've read elsewhere:

> Modern pirates favor small boats and taking advantage of the small number of crew members on modern cargo vessels. They also use large vessels to supply the smaller boarding vessels. Modern pirates can be successful because a large amount of international commerce occurs via shipping. Major shipping routes take cargo ships through narrow bodies of water such as the Gulf of Aden and the Straight of Malacca, making them vulnerable to be overtaken and boarded by small motorboats. Other active areas include the South China Sea and the Niger Delta. As usage increases, many of these ships have to lower speeds to allow for navigation and traffic control, making them prime targets for piracy.

Also, pirates often operate in regions of developing or struggling countries with smaller navies and large trade routes. Pirates sometimes evade capture by sailing into waters controlled by their pursuer's enemies. With the end of the Cold War, navies have decreased in size and patrol less frequently, while trade has increased, making organized piracy far easier.

"And here's the part you've been waiting for, Paul. It's a simple but important statement in this day and age. I've stated it at least once already but it bears repeating: '*Modern pirates are sometimes linked with organized crime syndicates*'."

"That's what I've been saying too, Syl."

"But here's another thing I just learned and haven't told you yet," she said. "Some pirate groups have become very friendly with certain Japanese elements—with our old friend, Asahara; with the New Kamikazis and even with Japan's main Mob, the Yakuza."

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"Because I just learned of it this morning and planned on telling you tonight."

"Still curious, Syl. How'd you learn of it?"

"That old communication device in my office? The receiving end—that's *my* end—I

overheard someone on a phone talking about it. I couldn't make out who it was … so much static. And as for determining its origin? Forget it. But I did make out essentially what I told you."

"Two things, dear: First and foremost, you really should get that antique replaced. And two, I'm afraid there's someone around the Hole who may be up to no good. Do we have a spy on our hands?"

Paul had been staying clear of definitive comment about piracy but decided it was time to contribute.

"What I'm able to add at this point," he said, "is to stress how widespread the problem has become and how many nations are trying to fix it."

He removed a batch of articles from his back pocket and skimmed through them as he spoke.

"The Indian navy, for example, captured twenty-three pirates in the Gulf of Aden not too long ago.

"Then soon after that, a German naval helicopter chased pirate speedboats off Yemen. Talk about sophistication—when they caught up with them, marine commandoes seized seven AK-47 rifles, three machine guns, mobile phones, satellite phones, Sonar systems, mounted machine guns, a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, a cache of other weapons, and a GPS receiver.

"And I didn't intend to, Syl, but bringing up politics, which we hardly ever speak about but I think agree on—is that it has a role in practically everything we've ever encountered or will encounter.

"In these modern times, for example, most will claim that ships and airplanes are hijacked for what could be interpreted as political reasons alone. But the perpetrators could be described as pirates.

"As it says here, some people state that the hijacking of the Italian passenger ship, the *Achille Lauro*, back in 1985, was politically motivated, but those in the know claim it was an act of piracy.

Paul skipped several other examples but thought it pertinent to site the French phrase for airplane hijacker:

"It's *pirate de l'air*—or, literally, *air pirate*.

"Now, what haven't we covered," he said, "before we put piracy to rest for the time being—just like we did with prostitution, diamonds and Perónism? I'll answer the question myself. First of all … according to what I have here … regarding legal principles …" He was having trouble with his words, yet took another sip. And he was happy he could read, rather than ad-lib:

> Under international law, any government may exercise jurisdiction over

conduct outside its territory if it deems that conduct to be universally dangerous to states and their nationals. It's called the *university principle* and its rationale is that states will punish certain acts wherever they occur as a means of protecting the global community as a whole. And it definitely applies to the crime of piracy committed on the high seas, regardless of the nationality of the pirates or victims.

Related to all this is the idea of self-protection. Simply stated, the best protection against pirates is to avoid encountering them. How? By using radar. In addition, many governments have recently changed the rules so that it's now the 'best practice' for vessels to embark with a team of armed security guards, and they can fire warning shots legally in international waters.

"The guards can be aboard the vessels—don't forget that," Sylvie amplified. She also said that other measures include implementing a high free wall and a vessel boarding protection system.

"In other words, it's tougher now for people to board a ship in transit if the potential boarders look suspicious. And, dear, let's wind up with the

last sentence I have written here: in an emergency, warships can be called upon; and unmanned surface vehicles or autonomous surface vehicles can be used."

"Robotic or remote controlled USVs and UAVs," Paul said.

"That's right. Sounds like we have the same reference materials." Sylvie tapped the stack of papers before her on the table.

He waved his hand in the air, saying, "Only difference is that you know most of this by heart … it's in your line of work. You're the pro … I'm only … only what? … only a reviewer."

"Well, we've reviewed enough for one night," she emphasized. "Let's eat."

"And wine it up."

"And wine it up."

Chapter 7

The next morning, after a sleep torn apart by vague dreams of indecision, Paul arose later than usual. Sylvie had already left for work.

First on Paul's agenda was to tackle the Marlene factor head-on. He had no intention of returning to Buenos Aires—at least for now—believing he could accomplish what he had in mind by telephone. He had little trouble reaching her and once she was convinced who he was, she relinquished her hearty and ready voice in favor of a more natural and even compliant one during some initial small talk.

Then Paul wasted little time. He spoke at length about his *Emerald* responsibilities and how important it was for her to level with him about

where she was staying; who the two parties were who received the diamonds she earned; whether or not she might be beholden to an organized crime syndicate; and if and how she might be tied in with piracy.

"We have to work together if we expect to get things accomplished," he said. "You've got to level with me and I've got to level with you. And we can operate secretly."

Paul waited briefly for a comment but with none forthcoming, he continued. "For starters—in addition to the factors I've already mentioned—I'm interested in the *extent* of piracy around the world and I believe you're interested in taking on a new role, as you informed us when we were there. One that might help you become Evita-like. Am I close?"

He was surprised to hear the answer. "I believe so," she said.

His ensuing internal monologue was among the most perplexing of his career. Albeit brief, he paraphrased what could have taken forever: *What next? What course do I take? Depends on the answers. The questions are there. Will her answers be legitimate? Her location. The mysterious "two parties". Relationship to organized crime. Relationship to piracy, if any.*

"Beautiful," he said. "Let's take them one at a time. And incidentally, Marlene, you may not realize it yet, but what you provide me now will set the pattern of my next few days—or weeks, if necessary. And I promise you, what you tell me will go a long way toward your dream of becoming the incarnation of the beloved Evita."

"But before I provide answers," she said, "what's the guarantee that you'll follow through with your end of the bargain?"

A question rather than an answer, but Paul wasn't surprised this time. "It's the chance you'll have to take, just as my doing so with you and *your* answers."

Once again, he had a sneaking suspicion that the person at the other end of the line was making notes. Either that or simply taking the time to digest what had already been said.

Finally Paul resumed the conversation. "Look, for starters, I'll arrange through Chief Gomez for you to meet key people—educators, industrialists, diplomats, investment bankers, computer geeks, the right politicians and so on. In other words, those who matter in Buenos Aires in this day and age.

"If you handle it right, you might be invited to all the key events that take place there. And I understand there are plenty. That way, your name,

your intentions of helping both the poor and the rich will eventually be circulated—and the rest would be up to you. But understand, Marlene: in going this route, any hanky-panky would have to be handled delicately. That's how Evita did it. Sorry to be so blunt about it, but you'd have to curb any appetite for more. In other words, forget diamonds and the sex to earn them.

"If, in selected cases, sex comes up, use your own judgment. But no diamonds. Remember, your reputation would be at stake.

"I suspect you'd have to change the way you dress, the amount you drink, your makeup—those sorts of things.

"And what I strongly suggest is that you have a female secretary to assist you through what I'd call a campaign. I have one in mind and she needn't be paid by you—I'd take care of it." Paul was referring to Dolores Sousa, his histarian friend.

"She could provide introductions at some of the big companies I myself have done business with, places like Bain & Company, Pan American Energy, Ernst and Young, Ford Argentina, and so on."

"All very interesting," Marlene said soberly, "and the way you've outlined it all, I guess I'm willing to go through with it."

Paul expected a more dynamic response, but it was positive nonetheless.

"So where do we start?" she asked. "If I remember right, prostitution, Perónism and pirates head the list."

She no doubt wrinkled up her nose before continuing.

"Prostitution? I hate that word. But you and I agree that from now on, sex should be dealt with only out of necessity."

In listening to her, Paul felt as though he were in a classroom. Only he wasn't clear about who was the teacher and who was student. But he could tell she had more to say.

"Perónism? That's what we're talking about. 'Aiming for' is a better way of describing it. That leaves piracy. And I'd wager you a night with me—if you'd be interested, of course—that it's the topic that definitely heads your list."

Paul then spoke as if she'd pleaded for him to do so. "Those three generalizations are correct, but I have more specific topics in mind. As I indicated before, I want to learn as much as I can about piracy around the world. And I haven't mentioned the other topics yet, but I've given them a great deal of thought:

"I want to know where you're staying and who the 'two parties' are who get—or were

given—the diamonds. Are you associated with an organized crime syndicate like the Yakuza in Japan or the 'Ndrangheta in Italy, especially Calabria? Finally, do you have any kind of relationship with piracy on the high seas?"

Marlene's response was immediate. And selective. "Why did you specify Italy's Calabria?"

"Because I'm familiar with many of the Mob figures there. In fact, we've become friends—sort of. I don't condone their activities but we're tolerant of one other—let's put it that way. Maybe some day I'll explain how we got to this point. It's very complicated."

There was an awkward silence during which Paul decided it was Marlene's turn to speak. And she did.

"Alright," she said, "I'm taking your word for all you say, and I'll start my end of it by telling you where I live. But come to think of it, why do you have to know?"

"It's not for *my* benefit, but Chief Gomez's. He may find it useful to speak to you in person."

"I see." She took a moment to weigh that reasoning before continuing. "If I'm not mistaken," she said, "I referred to it when you visited here. But to repeat: It's a small house high in the Sierra de la Ventana Mountains, southeast in the Pampas. It's isolated at the end of a dirt road marked 434

Pampas. But please don't tell anyone—except the Chief— because it would leak around fast and I'd be flooded with men callers of all ages. Know what I mean?"

"I promise not to."

"And he's trustworthy?"

"Completely. I've dealt with him for a long time."

"Good. Next, for number two of the three …"

Paul now knew she *had* been taking notes. And probably reading from a prepared script.

"This is probably the most difficult for me to reveal but the two parties I give the diamonds to are from Japan. Shoko Asahara and his companion—I don't know his name. I think he's Asahara's bodyguard. You may remember they wanted to end the world with drones releasing sarin gas. Incidentally, I know of your role in preventing that. Thank you. I'm not in favor of ending mankind, but I think he now wants to do so by somehow using pirates. I really don't understand the logic of it all.

"And where do I fit in? I supply the diamonds that serve as bait for certain pirates. That brings me to Velda. She's loaned to pirate boats that sneak up on big ships—mainly cargo ones but sometimes cruise ships. Then as she and the pirates

climb aboard from the rear, she's promised to the leader of all the men who greet them there. This makes the ransom money easy to get. Then the Mob and the pirates somehow split it up. I don't know what the percentages are."

Paul didn't utter a sound, although he thought that what he had just heard was shameful, at best. He made some notes in his notepad.

"Is that enough about pirates?" Marlene asked.

"Yes. And if you don't cooperate with Asahara?"

He could picture her running her finger across her throat. "I'm gone … history."

Paul hesitated little before proceeding. "And then there's the organized crime syndicates. What about them? The Mob. Any Mob involvement?"

"Thank God he lets me keep my distance from them. The most I can say about it is that Asahara and the Italian mobs usually get along but have their moments. Come to think of it, I failed to mention that he and the mobs would not be harmed by pirates in any … what he calls an 'international insurrection of piracy'."

Once again, Paul was sure she was reading from notes as well as taking them. He decided to broach the subject.

"Two other things, Marlene. One: you're reading from notes, I take it?"

"Of course. It shows how much all this means to me and my mind is like a sieve lately."

"I can see why. And two: just that I'm glad we had this talk. Let's keep the lines of communication open and I think we'll end up okay. Okay meaning intact. And please keep in mind, if you need my advice, call me. If I'm not available, call the Chief. I've already alerted him of such a possibility."

They ended the call after Marlene agreed with his comments. Then Paul set upon making his own notes about what had transpired. He could feel a bead of sweat edging down his cheek and wiped it away. It was then that he realized the phone call was one of the most emotional he'd ever made, if not the longest. He also wondered if it would have been at all reasonable to ask Marlene if she could move to the Cape so they might communicate more easily. At least temporarily.

When Sylvie returned from the Hole—she occasionally worked there for a few hours on Saturday mornings—Paul informed her of everything he could remember about the phone call. She listened intently and her only question

arose when he got into the subject of the Italian Mob.

"You'd have to interact with them. Right?"

"Afraid so. The 'Ndrangheta. We'd have to intercept anything they might be doing regarding Sarin Day. So it's possibly both the Japanese *and* the Italian Mob."

"And their criminal activity includes practically everything illegal?"

"Everything."

"Cripes, here we go again."

"Meaning?"

"Travel. I'd say you could talk by phone to your histarian there, but the mobsters are a different story."

"My knowing some of them will help."

"But you'd better change your attitude about travel," Sylvie said determinedly.

"Yeah, I know. Mainly not rushed like before. Oscar called it 'compressed'."

"It certainly was. A good description. And the wear and tear were obvious."

"I go along with that. Me, myself and I, along with time itself felt compressed. Never again that way."

All the rationalization, excuses and broken promises aside, Paul ended up in Calabria three days later. He had taken the seventy-two hours off

from concentrating on the remaining details of his *Emerald* assignment, and now felt sufficiently invigorated to reengage himself in "the battle". Sylvie understood and gave her silent approval. He had made the trip alone, not even calling ahead to speak with his old friend, Rocco Stratta.

If Rocco were not available, there were several other mobsters there whom he had befriended in the past, particularly the trio of Fabio Calderone and his buddies Gino and Sal. He had worked with them in conjunction with locating missing heirlooms he'd been hired to locate.

Two of the three were primarily greedy conmen who had hinted at how heirlooms would be hidden and disposed of financially. All Paul had to do was to provide sums that he considered fair, and to promise to protect their anonymity. For they dealt primarily in human trafficking, money laundering, contract killings, smuggling, pornography, political corruption, the illegal international drug trade, and the support of piracy in the Tyrrhenian and Ionion Seas.

Not Calderone, however. Of the three, he was the one Paul had primarily worked with during assignments throughout Europe, especially in Italy, Spain and France. And in doing so, he was assured no lives would be compromised.

The enigma of it all was that most of the perpetrators were popular businessmen and others who were considered upstanding by the general population. Their membership was worldwide, but Rocco dealt mainly with those who resided in Calabria itself.

Many had come upon the heirlooms accidentally, having "gotten in the way" of their main criminal activities. Items like scented gowns, attractive drawings by clandestine artists, and jewelry pieces that were unappreciated. By the Mob anyway.

Calabria forms the toe of the Italian Peninsula and is separated from Sicily by the Strait of Messina, only two miles away. Rocco owned a barbershop when they first met and they had their frequent discussions in a back room at closing time. The shop was within easy driving distance of the Lamezia Terme International Airport.

Upon landing at around noon—courtesy of the Joint Base Cape Cod unit—Paul phoned Rocco at his shop, hoping he was still working as a barber. He hadn't spoken with him in six months.

"Rocco, it's me, Paul D'Arneau from the States."

"Hey, goombah! How the hell are you?" His English was indistinguishable from a native American, having lived in upper New York for

most of his adolescence. He also attended New York University for three years and was now about sixty-five.

"I'm fine and I'm here."

"Where?"

"At your airport, and I can make it there within fifteen minutes, if you have the time."

"Of course, of course. Always have time for you, Paul. But why? Why make the trip? Is everything alright with your family—with your Sylvie?"

"Yeah, perfectly alright, but I'd rather wait till I get there before starting on why I was coming."

"I understand, but it must be important."

"Very."

"You'll be coming here alone?"

"Alone."

Chapter 8

Paul heard a bell ring as he opened the door to Rocco's shop. It was empty of customers and he himself was sitting in one of his two leather chairs, leafing through a magazine. Typical of most barber shops, a mirror spanned the back wall, which was fronted by a counter of neatly arranged scissors, combs and brushes. The place appeared clean but reeked of cigar smoke. Paul counted three spittoons scattered about. Three empty chairs lined one other wall, each separated by a small table stacked with newspapers and magazines. The third wall contained photos Paul recognized, having been in the country on several other occasions: The Cliff at Tropea, Pollino National Park, and views of Calabrian olive tree plantations from the air.

Rocco had not looked up at the mirror when Paul barked, "Hey, paisano, you want a haircut and shave?"

Spotting Paul's image in the mirror, Rocco nearly slipped on the floor as he jumped to his feet, bear-hugged his visitor and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

"It's been a long time, Paul," he said with obvious excitement. "You know, I was going to call you about something and I can't believe you called me instead. It's like—what would you call it? Fate?"

The barber was hardly Italian-looking. He was taller than Paul and had light brown hair peppered in gray and near-white. The same applied to his eyebrows, which were fluffy and curved around square rimmed glasses. Handsome and straight-backed, his smile seemed permanently glued as he spoke, but genuine.

He wore a collarless white shirt that hung loose at the waist and a long leather razor sharpener dangled at his side.

"Sounds like we're anxious to talk to each other," Paul said. "That's why I'm here. Shall we go to the back room as usual?"

"No need for that. It's the noon hour and most people are taking naps before they eat. I'll just hang up the *Closed for Lunch* sign and pull down

the shade. You can drop your satchel and we can talk right here."

"Sounds good to me. Let's cut out any reminiscing and stuff like that and get right to the point. Why don't you start?"

They sat on the customer chairs that Rocco pulled out.

"Well, it's like this, see? I'm tired of doing what I've been doing for so long. It's a double life, really. I want to go straight, even if I have to serve some time."

Paul was astounded.

The following silence revealed it, but he neither changed his expression nor asked for an explanation because he knew one was forthcoming.

Within a moment's deliberation, however, he concluded that if Rocco moved to the States and somehow participated in a witness protection program, two things might happen: Rocco might go free and he, Paul, might receive the cooperation he was after. That amounted to the reason for his traveling to Calabria in the first place.

"Tell me, Rocco, would you be willing to pull up stakes here and move to the United States? I can't guarantee it but I'm ninety percent sure I can help you there if you cooperate with our authorities."

"Right away?" Rocco inquired, his eyes nearly doubling in size.

"Right away. Come to think if it, I never asked if you have a family."

"No, I live alone."

"All the better. You wouldn't have to account to anyone."

"All except the *cosche* or families. They represent one-hundred organized groups that I used to have control over."

"But I understand you've been dealing with them less and less. That's what you told me on the phone."

"Yes, and I've cut out the meetings I used to attend. No one even notices. That probably helps."

Paul was more encouraged the more they spoke. He thought it might be time to indicate why he was there in the first place.

"Okay," he began, "that's enough coming from your end. We'll get back to specifics in a minute or two. I must mention though that if you agree to come to the States, we change your name, we change your looks, and so on—all in exchange for what you can do for me—actually for *us*."

Initially, both men had sat with arms crossed tightly across their chests. At this point, their hands were settled loosely on their laps, both playing idly with their fingers. Paul noticed and took it as a

positive sign, although, deep down, he wasn't a hundred percent convinced that Rocco was a hundred percent sincere in his desire to abandon his Italian Mob connections. Or that the Mob wouldn't go to great lengths to locate and punish him in some way. Even kill him.

But Paul had to trust his instincts, to take a chance. He decided to tell all he knew about the piracy issue and how Japan and Asahara fit in.

"You've heard—I take it—that Japan wanted to end the whole world by using drones that would release sarin gas? And that the attempt was foiled?"

"Yes. Were you involved with foiling it?"

"Indirectly."

"Well they're still up to no good."

On the spur of the moment, Paul decided not to go into detail. At first, he'd intended to share the entire master plan with Rocco but, thinking better of it, what followed was a combination of *sharing* some parts of it and holding back on other parts.

He could have said, for example, that they planned on using pirates who would selectively release a modified, non-dispersible form of sarin gas. By 'selectively', he would explain that upon a given signal (maybe by Asahara in Tokyo), certain pirate leaders in each of the seven continents would go ahead with the plot and release the gas. But he didn't touch that aspect of it.

Rather, he said, "Asahara and his followers don't want to change the world; they want to end it completely. They're calling the day it's done: 'Sarin Day'. You know him, I take it?"

"Never met him, but I know *of* him."

"Here's where you come in, Rocco. I don't have the particulars yet, but I'll be in touch. All I can say now is that we'll need help in ... in ... in nullifying any 'Ndrangheta cooperation with him and his group."

Rocco rose to pour a glass of water. He nervously gulped it all down before even asking Paul if he'd like a glass. Paul refused.

"Now," Paul said, "how many continents are there? Seven. I remember them alphabetically: Africa, the Americas, Antarctica, Asia, Australia, Europe and Oceania." But he held back on saying, "And there are seven pirate opposition leaders in each of them."

He stopped abruptly and gave his chin's decision scar a good rubbing, unsure of whether or not to elaborate or to address the issue of mythology. He would go ahead with only the latter.

"You may have heard that one of the reasons for my dismissal from Yale was my fascination with mythology. Actually, I think that alone wouldn't have amounted to anything. It was their contention that I was a so-called '**regressive**

mythologist'—which is not true. But they pinned that label on me. Frankly, I still don't know what difference it made, but I have to admit, a day doesn't go by when I don't think about what they concocted."

"I apologize, Rocco, for bringing all this up—but you'll soon see where I'm heading."

"Forget the apology, Paul. This is fascinating." He paused before saying, "Just keep going."

"First and foremost, I wouldn't bet my life on mythology alone, but when I know of examples that bolster my certain way of thinking about something, I welcome it. In this case, it concerns my rationalization for how we never let Sarin Day arrive. The day itself will, of course, but it won't involve sarin.

"Take any of the continents, for example. There are plenty of mythological examples of potential attackers falling short in their efforts because of 'more resourceful Gods or souls' who outperform them by a day or two. And that cancels out their bad intentions."

Paul felt as though he were on a roll.

"It takes a great deal of ingenuity and imagination to make sense of most mythology. Regarding our current subject matter, 'the more resourceful Gods and souls' can be interpreted as

meaning 'more resourceful pirates and histarians'. So what do we do here?

"Oh, I should have pointed out: the whole operation will be implemented through our histarians. I've told you about them before. And they, in turn, know which pirates around the world are good pirates and which are not."

Rocco was nodding now and then but Paul read him as not following closely.

Once again, Paul thought but didn't say: *Through the efforts of our histarians, the day* ***before*** *'Sarin Day', the seven opposition leaders will be killed. The timing must be precise so that the signal is never given.*

In case you're wondering, mythology or not, our histarians must—repeat—must—accomplish their mission. Otherwise, their lives would be at stake, too. Also yours, Rocco. And many things have to take place simultaneously.

Realistically, Paul had no idea whether or not Rocco completely comprehended what he was trying to get across. Or even if he, Paul, was making sense of it. But in his own mind, he'd touched on the collateral essentials of his assignment, as agreed to with Oscar and *Emerald*.

Yet, as had occurred so often in the past, whatever he was hired to do fell short of what he'd finally taken on. And this was the first time he had

to interact closely with a foreigner who (1) may or may not have understood what he had tried to convey, and (2) one whose trust had never been tested. The one consoling element, however, was that Rocco might soon be in U.S. custody.

Then, out of the blue, the barber brought up the name of Velda! "You know of her, right?"

"Yeah, good old Velda."

From there they chatted briefly about Marlene and the box of diamonds. Rocco insisted he knew nothing of such a box, but reiterated he wasn't as close to the goings on of his Mob anymore. Within minutes, he returned to Velda.

"I've had her myself. Many times. Not bad. She wouldn't get hurt, would she?"

"No. I doubt it."

"Good."

It appeared to Paul that there was a special relationship between Rocco and Velda—maybe just "private property." At least "semi-private."

If the guy only knew.

"She may turn out to be valuable in the long run," he said.

"I gotta admit, though," Rocco said, "that there's a large group around here that's almost decided to go straight. They're the *picciotti d'onore* or soldiers. Let me handle them. If it's a piece of ass they want, we have plenty of other ways."

Paul picked up his satchel and said, "I think we've covered what both of us planned on saying. I'll run along now, but I'll get back to you soon. You still have my phone number?"

Rocco pointed toward one of the magazine tables and said, "Right over there in the top drawer—where I keep all my important numbers."

At the door, Paul paused and decided to add: "I'll leave you with two thoughts about how we might look upon our complicated scheme, Rocco: First, we might end up using good pirates to catch bad pirates. And second comes from the diary of Christopher Columbus, written in 1492."

He opened his satchel and removed a paper that was stuffed in a side pocket. It was titled "Mythic Voices" and he read part of it:

> They must be good servants and very intelligent, because I see that they repeat very quickly what I told them, and it is my conviction that they would easily become Christians, for they seem not to have any sect. If it please our Lord, I will take (7) of them that they may learn to speak. The people are totally unacquainted with arms, as your Highnesses will see by observing the seven which I have caused to be taken in. With fifty men, all can be kept in

subjection, and made to do whatever you desire.

Paul wasn't entirely satisfied with the meeting. At times, Rocco sounded resolute and cooperative. At others, he seemed as uncertain as a diver about to plunge from an unfamiliar height.

Chapter 9

At home in Falmouth on Wednesday, Paul outlined the entire Calabria experience to Sylvie who interrupted their breakfast only twice with the same remark: "Pretty heavy stuff."

"It certainly is. How did I get into this mess?" Paul felt as though all his problems were wrapped tightly around his mid-section, and that to loosen them would take heroic measures. If they could be loosened at all. Yet he tried to be upbeat.

"So what we have here, Syl, is Sarin Day and what we should be thinking of as Serendipity Day. Here's hoping we can call it that when it's all over."

She started to laugh but quickly covered her mouth with her hand and said, "If it weren't so

serious, that would be funny. I mean 'Sarin' and 'Serendipity'."

"I agree. I made up the 'Serendipity' on the flight back."

"Clever, clever, my dear. By chance, any idea when Sarin Day would be?"

"No clue whatsoever. That's why I'm calling Japan's Tomi Hoshi tomorrow. Remember him—the publicity guy at Takeda Pharmaceutical? Maybe he can help. Meanwhile, I guess my task will be to round up the histarians."

"That sounds like the next thing to do. I mean getting in touch with Tomi. He was so helpful last time. And, oh, before I forget, tomorrow night we're having a five-year anniversary party for the addition to the Research Center. It's something we obviously have to attend."

"Obviously," Paul responded dryly. But he changed his tone when he followed with, "But wait a minute! Maybe that person who listens in on the intercom calls may be there. He or she may be the one you referred to awhile back—the one who talked about Asahara and the New Kamikazis and Japan's main Mob."

He let his comment settle in, then said, "You know, I hadn't thought about it this way before, but that person had to be talking to someone else about

those groups. So there may be more than one spy right under our nose. I mean yours, so be careful what you say on that blasted intercom. **Get it replaced! Damn it!**"

Paul followed his outburst with an immediate apology. He took her hand and said, "Sorry for that. There are so many things that sound simple enough—probably to both of us—but there's so much to do, so much to coordinate."

"I understand," she responded. "I'll tend to the intercom in the morning." But not to be undone, she added, "And don't be so pushy. Oh, I almost forgot. You got a call about giving a talk. Any topic you want."

"Where?"

"The Falmouth Library. To their Book Club. About thirty or forty members."

"When?"

"Tonight."

"Tonight? But I'm tired."

"Do it, dear. Won't take long. We've talked about it so often—that most speakers feel stressed, but you become relaxed. It'll do you good."

Paul got up and paced for a minute or two, then returned to finish his cup of tea. "See?" he said. "See how relaxed I am." He had walked like Frankenstein.

"Come off it, Paul. Will you do it or not?"

"Okay, okay. But on one condition."

"What's that?"

"If you make the call. And find out the time."

She went into their living room to look up the number in the phone book and to place the call. She took longer than Paul had expected. When she returned, he told her so and asked why.

"It's so strange," she explained. "The head librarian said no one from there called you, but yes, please come along and speak to the group. They'd be honored. They meet at seven."

Paul wondered about the mix-up but didn't dwell on it, blaming it on some kind of communication glitch.

The day was cool and Paul could taste its humidity. Such a backdrop (together with Sylvie's "smart ass" remark and the prospect of giving a lecture that night) didn't strike Paul as an ideal time to phone Tokyo.

Yet his call to Takeda Pharmaceutical went through smoothly. A receptionist informed him that Tomi Hoshi was at an important business meeting nearby, but he could be told who was on the line and would either come to the phone immediately or return the call shortly.

"No hurry," Paul said and with that, heard Tomi's deep voice saying, "But now I'm free. I heard the conversation just as we were finishing up. How you been? And I bet I know why you're calling."

Tomi had spent considerable time studying in the United States. He had an undergraduate degree from Harvard and a Master's from Northeastern University's School of Pharmacy in Massachusetts.

"I've been fine except over my head as usual. Another risky assignment about something that would probably scare everybody to death if they knew about it. You okay?"

"Yes, and you'll never guess why we had the meeting that just finished. In fact, I told the others I'd contact you because you'd probably appreciate our input."

Perplexed, Paul asked, "Are we talking about the same thing?"

"I'm afraid so: the New Kamakazis and pirates."

"This is unreal, Tomi. How on earth …"

"I have a friend who's in solid—and secretly—with the Kamakazis and he told me all about their plans. I immediately called the meeting with the three or four I trust around here the most. I hope you don't mind, but I brought up your name as

being the one who could best interfere with those plans."

Paul was both bewildered and indecisive. His call was to inform Tomi about pirate input and seek out whatever he could from the Japanese standpoint. He wasn't sure, however, about how much he should reveal before all important elements had been coordinated and put into place.

"You're aware of the so-called Sarin Day?" Paul asked.

"Well aware."

"Let's cut to the chase then, Tomi. When's it to take place?"

"I don't know yet, but I'm working on it."

"Can you say if it's days, weeks or months away?"

"I think weeks, most likely. Probably two. This is why you called?"

"Yeah, but also one other important reason. Is there such a thing as a modified, non-dispersible form of sarin gas?"

"I'm afraid so. Our company produces its precursor chemicals right here, and as you're certainly aware, it's what they have in mind to release in all seven continents."

"Even Antarctica?"

"Even Antarctica."

"But there's hardly anyone living there," Paul said.

"They brag about a *complete* job, and this would make it complete."

"But why produce those chemicals?"

"Because they're used for purposes other than sarin."

"I see."

Talking about the gas made Paul anxious to return to Asahara.

"Asahara?" he questioned, and didn't allow a response. "You think he'd meet with me or would it be too dangerous?"

"Dangerous? Yes. Too dangerous? Not necessarily, especially if I accompany you."

"Why's that?"

"Because we're the only company that can provide those chemicals I referred to before. The ones needed to make sarin in the first place. They had plenty left over twenty years ago, but the police confiscated all of it. So in a way he's beholden to me."

"I take it you've met him?"

"Many times. Let's say met '*with*' him."

Paul felt it was worth a try and asked Tomi if, indeed, he could arrange the meeting and accompany him to it.

"I'd be glad to. When's a good time?"

Automatically, Paul's mind returned to his self-promise not to rush into things anymore. "Well," he said, "let's see. It's now Wednesday here. How about Sunday or Monday, your time?"

"I'll contact him today and find out."

"And if the answer's 'yes', you'll come with me?"

"Definitely."

Paul had been to the Falmouth Library more than a few times, usually to locate material that would be helpful in his investigations. But he had never taken in its ambience as he did this night at six-forty-five: the ornate vestibule with its golden walls and domed ceiling; the main desk smothered with flowers and announcement notes; the double lines of totally occupied computers; a relatively small auditorium with rows of folding chairs, all occupied, perhaps forty in number; its walls plastered by children's drawings; the grand piano close behind a lighted podium; its microphone, which Paul immediately elected not to use; and the small left side room used exclusively for storage. More like a closet in size, its door was roughly six inches ajar. But he could make out piles of extra chairs within its darkness.

At seven p.m. and after a glowing introduction by Evelyn Connors, the head librarian,

Paul leaned on the podium and said that the talk he was about to deliver was the most popular of the many he'd given on various cruise liners. It was about why people are so fascinated with murderers and murder mysteries. But this time he would eliminate the mystery part and concentrate on murderers only. Such a talk, he explained, was followed in popularity by one dealing with DNA and the new genetics. He'd decided not to include it because it was so long. But a close third was one he *would* include, yet wouldn't identify until later.

It was one he was sure that those in attendance would never have anticipated, but he believed was so revealing that he'd written a short essay about it. And he'd read it to them as a conclusion to his presentation.

Leaning on the podium, he began the lecture:

> So why do some people murder anyway? And what are their characteristics?
>
> Let's put aside the main reasons: Revenge. Monetary gain. A love triangle. Drug-related. Crimes of passion. Hate crimes. Terrorism. Political or religious. Genocide and ethnic cleansing.

They comprise the most in number but as I said, put them aside.

We're left then with the following three categories, smaller in numbers, yet still substantial: the hardened killer; what I call the terrible triad plus two; and sort of a catch-all, controversial group, which I'll get to in a minute.

Hardened killers? The common denominator is lack of self-esteem. They know it because they feel it, and they blame society, or a segment of society or a single individual within society.

So they develop a deviant desire to inflict pain and suffering.

Or they develop a distorted concept of justice—their **own** justice.

Or they want to correct a non-existent wrong, one only **they** can perceive.

Or they might want to call attention to themselves. That might have been what was behind the killing of John Lennon, the Beatle. *You know, give me somebody famous. I'll handle him or her. I'll show them.*

Many of these individuals come from dysfunctional families that are too busy satisfying their *own* needs and don't have

the time or inclination to tend to their children as they're growing up. So we have lack of love, lack of attention and the worst combination of all: unbridled freedom coupled with no responsibility.

Now what I've said so far answers many of the questions about our first group, but not all because we've all heard of a terrible family environment that nonetheless produces a star—a high achiever. And just the reverse: where a so-called ideal family yields a rotten apple. How come? Well, I think it has to do with the level of maturity. And I don't mean intellectual maturity. But behavioral maturity.

In the case of the rotten apple, he hasn't grown up in this regard. He's still functioning at the level of a two-year-old, and we all know what two-year-olds can be like: temper tantrums, self-centered, destructive—and that's the operative word. *Destructive*. Sigmond Freud once said, "If two-year-olds could band together, they would destroy the world!"

As for the terrible triad: mass, serial and spree. The mass murderer is so much in the headlines in recent years: four or

more people killed in one incident. Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, Fort Hood in Texas, Washington Naval Shipyard, Newtown in Connecticut—fifteen miles from where I used to live. Twenty-six people gunned down in a school there.

This guy—and it's a guy ninety-three percent of the time—doesn't want to match wits with the police, who don't determine his identity until after the fact. Not until they sort through the mess. But obviously he has some kind of a grudge, wants to make a statement, and doesn't expect to come out alive.

In fact, he doesn't want to. It's as if he's near the end of a book about himself and his own demise in the last chapter is a perfect exclamation point. So he'll either kill himself or commit "cop suicide". That's where he comes out of a building, for example, without his hands held high or without waving a white handkerchief, knowing that he'll be killed in a hail of police gunfire. For him, there's no need for an emotional cooling off period. There's no time for it. It's over almost before he starts.

Next, the serial killer. Three or more killings. Here, he *does* match wits with the police and expects to get away with what he's doing. He kills and waits a day or two before his next killing. Or he waits a week, or a month, or a year or more—because he needs emotional cooling off periods. The acts make him feel fulfilled. The more the better sometimes. His motivation is sexual in nature, but not always. Rather, it might be a question of control or manipulation. *Domination* of a woman in the most vile way. All the while, the police don't know his identity until they capture him.

Examples? Ted Bundy or "Son of Sam"—David Berkowitz in New York City—come to mind.

Number three is the spree killer. Murders at two or more locations. They generally move around rapidly and feel they're on a roll. This in itself is fulfilling. And when they stop at those two or more locations, they're robbing stores or banks and the like, and killing anyone in their way. The police know who they are and it's just a matter of time before they're caught. In fact, they're aware of the police knowing their identity and it's a strain on them. So

they start making mistakes and begin drinking or using drugs. Examples? The Beltway Sniper or Bonnie and Clyde.

Next is the psychotic. Legally insane. Out of touch with reality. Doesn't know right from wrong. Hears things and sees things he shouldn't be seeing or hearing. Example? Again, Son-of Sam. There's overlap of some of these murderers. Sam was Berkowitz's dog who was telling him whom to murder.

And the psychopath. Just the opposite regarding characteristics. Not legally insane, does know right from wrong and so forth. But he rampages through life committing dastardly deeds, including murder, with no sense of guilt. He cannot accept love unless it's sexual in nature. He's detached and has a certain faraway look in his eyes. Example? Scott Peterson. Modesto, California.

Finally, the controversial, catch-all group. At some centers, scientists believe these individuals have some kind of anatomical or chemical brain disorder. A nubbin here, a shrinkage there. They speak of the forebrain, the thalamus, the corpus callosum. Some scientists claim the

existence of a "criminal mind". Others, that some are born a potential murderer. I feel the only problem with all of this is that their studies can't be duplicated elsewhere. Until they can, I can't subscribe to their views.

Paul was nearly out of breath and leaned more heavily on the podium.

This is relaxation? What's stress then?

He scanned the audience to see if anyone had fallen asleep. Quite the contrary—some were taking notes!

"And now it's time for my essay," he said. "Are you ready for this? As I said before, it considers the third most popular topic I'm asked about during my world cruises. Fifty cruises I might add—over a ten-year span. It's all about *Jack the Ripper.*"

Members of the audience shifted in their seats. Back and forth. As they did so, Paul imagined a peculiar connection between the prostitution topic he'd been dealing with and the issue of prostitution in the Ripper saga.

"Here we go":

The time: a nine-week period in the fall of 1888, sometimes referred to as "The Autumn of Terror".

The place: the Whitechapel district of London. That was the east end. Where the slums were. Where prostitutes flourished.

Jack the Ripper: Few names in history are as instantly recognizable. Fewer still evoke such vivid images: noisy courts and alleys, cabs and gaslights, swirling fog, prostitutes decked out in the tawdriest of finery, the shrill cry of newsboys—and silent, cruel death personified in the cape-shrouded figure of a faceless prowler of the night, armed with a long knife and carrying a Gladstone bag.

And his identity is still unknown—although there's hardly a year in the hundred-and-twenty-seven since, when a new brainstorm doesn't emerge, whether from law enforcement or from popular mystery writers. When experts don't continue to speculate.

I won't dwell on the many aspects of this tale—it would take all night. But I'll list a few:

1—The homicides themselves: at least five; usually with terrible brutalization.

2—The victims: all female prostitutes; usually older and with alcohol problems.

3—The investigation. Intense. Prolonged.

4—The endless theories.

5—The abundance of graffiti.

6—The varied letters and postcards, some considered authentic (i.e., sent by the killer), but most considered hoaxes.

7—The suspects: a mad doctor; a professional butcher; a deranged mid-wife; a mysterious lodger; even a member of royalty.

Actually, so much of the Ripper tale is mired in mystery and myth. And with the passage of time, much can get (1) exaggerated, (2) embellished upon, or (3) otherwise distorted.

I have a simple way of viewing such things: *The older a story, the more grains of salt it should be taken with.*

But here goes. It's not very long—quite concise in fact. I'll just devote the next page or two to why the Ripper continues to be discussed. To give you a sense of what it's all about.

I must emphasize, first and foremost, that Jack the Ripper created the myth,

representing the evil archetype of the more modern serial killer.

This isn't to say that the whole story is a myth—just that the story is one of mythical proportions.

But by today's standards, Jack the Ripper would barely make international headlines. I mean, come on!

1—The murder of five prostitutes in a slum swarming with criminals?

2—Just one more violent creep satisfying his perverted needs?

3—No, hardly anyone would be as incensed over the fate of those five prostitutes as were the respectable families and friends of the pretty college students who were Ted Bundy's victims. At least 30, here in the United States.

4—Unfortunately, we've become a society numbed by horrible crimes inflicted upon many victims—especially in the last dozen years or so.

Why then are there still stories and songs and operas and movies and a never-ending stream of books about this one Victorian criminal?

Why are there many Ripperologists and no Bundyologists?

Why is the Ripper story as popular today as it was in Victorian London?

For two main reasons: First, because *Jack the Ripper* represents the classic whodunit. The story has a terrifying, almost supernatural quality.

It's been said that he came out of the fog, killed violently by slashing a throat from ear to ear, and quickly disappeared without a trace.

And, after his last victim was found, he vanished from the face of the earth. Forever.

But—over time, much has been distorted, and that brings us to the second reason for its continued fascination: misimpression.

In spite of their barbarism, the murders represent a real-life mystery from the era of Sherlock Holmes—the late 1880s—the bygone, romantic era of high Victorian society, with gaslights and swirling London fog.

But get this. Not one single killing took place on a foggy night! Not one single killing had any real relationship to Victorian splendor!

Plus, of all possible coincidences, at the same time these murders were occurring, guess what was thrilling audiences across town at the Lyceum Theater, in the fashionable west end?

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde!

Together—these two things—a classic whodunit and the Jekyl and Hyde coincidence gave many people their first awareness of the potential for inherent evil in so-called normal individuals.

Finally, I'll abruptly end this brief essay with—first—no hint of who I think the killer was, because I haven't the slightest clue.

And second—with the unabashed claim that if DNA and the new genetics had been available back then, the mystery would have been cracked in short order.

But just imagine— if that had been the case, we probably wouldn't have such a lasting melodrama, would we?

"And ladies and gentlemen, that's my 'Ripper Report'. It will endure, probably for eternity, because …"

Paul heard the rattling of chairs within the storage room to his left. He signaled the audience with a no-sound sign, his finger across his lips. And while still talking— "… because there is no reason …", he edged away from the podium, toward the room. He was in a crouched position and able to withdraw his pistol from its ankle rig. And though he moved in measured steps, he felt like a patient in a dentist's waiting room.

Suddenly, several rapid-fire gunshots echoed throughout the auditorium. All eyes shifted in the direction of the storage room.

The podium was ripped in half. One leg was torn from the grand piano and a blood-curdling and lingering screech of high notes emanated from its interior.

The audience screamed en masse and scrambled out toward the main desk.

Meanwhile, whoever was in the storage room clumsily beat it out the back door, slamming it shut in the process. Paul straightened and took chase but by the time he'd leaped over some fallen chairs and reached the door, the person or persons had disappeared. Paul saw a car speeding away into the night. He thought its shape was that of a *Buick Verano* but couldn't be sure.

He returned to an empty auditorium and on toward the main desk. Only a few from his

audience remained behind and the head librarian had a phone receiver in her hand, about to dial a number.

Spotting Paul, she said in a trembling voice, "We should be calling the police, shouldn't we?"

"I wouldn't bother," Paul replied. "They'd end up contacting everyone who was here—and I mean everyone. Then the media would get hold of it and who would suffer? Our library here—our reputation. The general public would be scared to drop by."

"But one or two of them—maybe all of them—would call the police."

"Let's wait and see. Maybe none would want to get involved. And Evelyn, I now understand all about no one here contacting me to speak. It was no doubt the shooter who called. And incidentally, get a new piano leg and a new podium. And get the piano's guts repaired. Then send me the bill."

Evelyn put the phone down and gave Paul a prolonged hug.

He drifted away in thought. *Makes me ask a stupid question: could the shooter have been a distant relative of the Ripper? Hardly! More like an oriental or a pirate's cousin. But a Ripper's relative does make a* ***little*** *sense if we hypothesize that he wanted to hear the entire Ripper essay before he shot. Haphazardly, thank God.*

Paul had become immune to such developments—but not with this impact. So he couldn't wait to return home and tell Sylvie about it.

Before he even closed the door at 88 Crest Drive, he yelled out, "I'm home. And if that was supposed to relax me, then I'm an elephant. Actually, I feel more like a mouse right about now."

She rushed to his side and asked, "What's that mean? Maybe I should have come along."

"No, you've heard me on ships so many times. This wasn't a new lecture. You would have been bored stiff. Besides, you might have been shot."

"What?"

Paul detailed the whole experience and then referred to the person who called with the invitation.

"Male or female?" he asked.

"Male."

"Accent?"

"No, but come to think of it he had a gruff voice, and I thought it peculiar that he hung up as abruptly as he did."

The anniversary party on Thursday night began at five p.m. It was held in a large assembly

hall at the Hole's Research Center, one that was usually reserved for lectures by visiting dignitaries. Row upon row of chairs had been replaced by individual tables, each of which sat eight people.

Up front near the stage, Sylvie and Paul sat side by side at one table while five individuals occupied all but one of the other chairs. The eighth chair was deliberately left unoccupied in honor of a scientist who had passed away within the year.

On the stage, American flags were stationed on each side of a pulpit. Nearby were various audiovisual materials, including flip charts, numerous maps of all sections of the world, overhead projectors and at least four tables filled with compact disc recorders and VCRs.

There were about three-hundred attendees crowding all the tables. Paul assumed some were visitors or relatives of the researchers.

Earlier, when he and Sylvie had arrived slightly late, they were greeted with sustained applause. Sylvie gave a thumbs-up sign while Paul waved zealously as they maneuvered to their table, bumping into waiters and waitresses who were bumping into one other.

"I didn't know I was so well known and liked here," Paul whispered in her ear as he adjusted her chair. She yawned.

Introductions at the table were cordial.

During the course of the meal, Paul learned that two of the other five—both males—had insisted that the anniversary committee allow them to sit at the same table as Sylvie's.

Paul immediately focused his attention on both of them, directing most comments and questions their way. Their answers were that yes, they had worked at the Hole for at least ten years. No, they knew little about worldwide piracy. Yes, they had visited the Far East several times on business, but didn't specify Japan.

Nor did Paul wish to belabor the last point for fear it would raise suspicion of some kind.

But at the conclusion of the party—a few dull speeches included—he decided, "What the hell" and asked the loudest of the two, Larry Albino, if he knew or had ever heard of one Shoko Asahara from Japan.

Albino seemed taken by surprise and said, "Let's see. Asahara? No, afraid not. Is he important to know?"

Repeatedly helping himself to the bread basket and careless with knife and fork, Albino had taken off his jacket and rolled up his shirt sleeves—virtually to the shoulders, thereby displaying impressive biceps that he tensed now and then. He had more tattoos than an NBA center and was just as tall, with clothes that looked as though they'd

been stretched to fit. He appeared to be in his early thirties and had puffy jowls that swallowed his teeth and made his eyes more sunken than they really were. Eyes that flitted around as he spoke. He struck Paul as being the perfect poster-boy for a mob family.

"Important to know?" Paul said. "Not really. He's just interested in all the great waterways of the world." Sylvie always knew when Paul lied.

Later, after they had separated from the others, Paul said, "There's your man."

She agreed but questioned why he wanted to sit at their table.

"My guess is to see what he could learn."

"About what?"

"Anything and everything," was Paul's best choice of words, "and I'll bet he's somehow associated with a mob."

Chapter 10

In addition to having Oscar arrange for the flight to Tokyo, and not having spoken to him in some time, Paul spent nearly an hour bringing *Emerald's* chairman up to date. It was Thursday night.

Consulting his notepad, he focused mainly on Marlene and Velda; Calabria, Rocco and the odds of his eventual murder; Larry Albino and his probable spying on Sylvie at Wood's Hole; Dolores and the proposed arrangement with Marlene; Tomi at Takeda Pharmaceutical; pirates in general; and Mob influences around the globe.

Oscar listened attentively and proffered neither objection nor suggestion, but he did ask: "Why meet with Asahara in the first place?"

Out of all the individuals Paul had commented on, he was taken with Oscar's choice of question.

"I just want to see what jerko's like," Paul answered, "and hear directly from him everything I can about his relationship with pirates."

"That's reasonable."

"Reasonable?"

"I mean it makes good sense."

"Oh," Paul said, "I left out being shot at in our local library and being kidnapped before that, but only for a brief spell. And I even think the two shots from the black Citroen were intended for me, not you."

"Hard to tell. We'll probably never know. But shot at? What were you doing at the library?"

"Mainly giving a talk about murderers."

"You talk about murderers, and you get shot at? Odd."

"Murderers here, murderers there. Oh well."

"I wish I had your outlook, Paul."

Within a day or two, Takeda Pharmaceutical's Tomi Hoshi notified Paul that Shoko Asahara would be available on Monday morning, Japan time.

It was early on U.S.'s Sunday when Paul left on the flight to Tokyo via the usual Joint Base

Cape Cod air force unit. About an hour before landing, he once again leafed through his satchel and found an article he planned on reading for the third time, this time every word—and slowly. He had downloaded it several months before.

According to the Internet's *History.com This Day In History*, it had been twenty years since Tokyo subways were attacked with sarin gas. Paul read of the circumstances surrounding the attack and its aftermath:

March 20, 1995

Several packages of deadly sarin gas were set off in the Tokyo subway system killing twelve people and injuring over five-thousand.

Sarin gas was invented by the Nazis and is one of the most lethal nerve gases known to man.

Tokyo police quickly learned who had planted the chemical weapons and began tracking the terrorists down. Thousands of checkpoints were set up across the nation in the massive dragnet.

The gas attack was instituted by the Aum Shinrikyo (which means Supreme Truth) cult. The Supreme Truth had

thousands of followers all over Japan who believed in their doomsday prophesies. Because it claimed the personal assets of new cult members, the Supreme Truth had well over a billion dollars stashed away.

Shoko Asahara, a forty-year-old blind man, was the leader of the cult. Asahara had long hair and a long beard, wore bright robes, and often meditated while sitting on satin pillows, His books included claims that he was the second coming of Jesus Christ and that he had the ability to travel through time.

Japanese authorities raided the Supreme Truth compounds across the country, but could not find Asahara. At one camp at the base of Mt. Fuji, police found tons of the chemicals used to produce sarin gas. They also found plans to buy nuclear weapons from the Russians.

The police eventually located Hideo Murai, one of the cult's other top leaders, but when he was taken into custody, he was stabbed to death by an assassin who blamed Murai for the poison gas attack.

Shortly thereafter, the police found a hidden basement at the Mt. Fuji compound where other cult leaders were holed up,

including Masami Tsuchiya, a chemist who admitted making the sarin gas.

Still, Asahara remained at large and the Supreme Truth made four more gas attacks on the subways, injuring hundreds more. Another potentially deadly chemical bomb was defused in a subway restroom. The nation's top police officer was shot by a masked terrorist, adding to the country's unrest.

Finally on May 16, Asahara was found in yet another secret room of the Mt. Fuji compound and arrested. Along with scores of the other Supreme Truth leaders, Asahara was charged with murder.

Their doomsday predictions had finally come true, albeit on a much smaller and more personal scale than they had envisioned.

Subsequently, Paul learned that after Asahara was released from prison eight years later, he disappeared from view for about ten years, but then showed up as what he referred to as a forest worker. Though blind, he was able to issue tickets at a rain forest's entryway with the help of an associate.

As Paul's plane taxied to a remote location, he asked the pilots to remain close by for he didn't expect to spend more than an hour there—two at the most—before heading back to the Cape.

He saw Tomi waving at him from the nearest entrance to the air terminal and waved back. They shook hands warmly and said very little to one another. Tomi then led him to his car and they headed off.

"Where are we meeting him?" Paul asked.

"Near the entrance table to the rain forest is a fairly large building he calls his adjutant office. We can meet inside and his partner can take over with any customers outside. Frankly, I think Asahara's position there was given to him simply because of who he is. Blind but still powerful."

They walked in and individually indicated who they were. The cult leader, ignoring Tomi, said in a booming voice, "Welcome to you, Mr. D'Arneau. Thank you for flying all the way to my country."

"You're welcome," Paul said flatly.

"Let's the three of us sit on the three chairs I had brought in, shall we?"

Asahara rose from a satin pillow and, to Paul's surprise, appeared to be the biggest man of Japanese extraction he had ever seen. He had long straight black hair, slanted eyes and a sallow,

wrinkled complexion. His protruding teeth were evenly spaced and matched his skin color. He wore a hakama made of navy blue striped silk, loose at the waist and binding in the leg.

The room they occupied was furnished with brightly colored furniture—desks, tables, bookcases, lamps—along with computer and copying equipment. The three chairs Asahara had delivered there were of different colors: red, white and blue. Paul deliberately avoided commenting on them, instead deciding to express a concern head on.

"I have other countries to visit today and my pilots are waiting for me," he said, "so getting right to one of the points in coming here …"

"Yes, I'll honor your other responsibilities, my friend."

"There are some groups who are disappointed in you," Paul declared.

Asahara let out a lusty laugh—obviously faked. It's ending was sudden and he replied, "Many people have been and still are. But in this case, why the disappointment?"

"Because of your use of some of your factions for a bad purpose."

"Which is?"

"Ending the world."

"Oh, but not all of it. My supreme cult will survive. Would you care to join?"

"No, thank you." Paul felt belittled and changed to the other subject he'd planned on bringing up.

"Do you know many pirates?" he asked.

"A few. The factions you said had complained."

Paul collected himself somewhat. "But why end the world?" he asked.

"What good is it as it is? Every nation fighting with every nation. Every politician fighting with every politician. The dollar bill not worth a dime. I have people read newspapers to me every day: corruption, violence, rape, murder, kidnapping, stealing, embezzlement, kickbacks. Even many sports are fixed in your country. The world deserves to exist?"

"So you figure the solution is to end it all?" Paul asked.

"Why not? You people don't understand."

Paul couldn't take it any longer. "Hey, wait now," he nearly screamed. "You're criticizing *us*? C'mon Tomi. Let's get outa here."

Tomi thanked the cult leader for meeting with them.

Paul, red-faced, didn't bother.

Asahara yanked on a cord that hung from the ceiling and within seconds a frighteningly tall Japanese man appeared out of nowhere. He brandished a silver-coated sword.

"Hurry!" Asahara shouted. "Not Tomi. I need him. The other misguided fool."

Paul allowed his body to tense preparatory to using the rapid fire Atemiwaza technique of jujitsu. After one swift move, the sword went flying in one direction and the man in the opposite direction. He'd been swept off his feet. On the way to the floor, Paul levied a blow to his neck for good measure. The man lost consciousness but Paul assured both Tomi and Asahara that he would recover.

Looking in Tomi's direction, Paul said softly, "Time to go."

Just outside the building, Tomi stared at Paul as if he had to contribute something.

"Imagine what he'd be like if he weren't blind," he said.

"God help us," Paul responded.

"Yes. Please!"

"I hope He does."

Paul wanted to drop the subject but gave in to one last question: "Why on earth do you deal with a guy like that? I mean providing chemicals for him."

The answer came quickly. "Remember I only *work* for Takeda Pharmaceuticals, and only as its publicity person. I don't set policy or have anything to do with their selection of customers. Why he latched onto me … I have no idea. But my superiors instructed me to cooperate. 'Remember', they told me, 'they're the same chemicals used by other companies for different purposes'."

Regardless of Tomi's explanation, however, coupled with meeting Larry Albino at the Research party—and even with Oscar himself—Paul's wonder had turned to outright suspicion. Less so regarding Oscar, but nonetheless there. It was the *Emerald* chairman's statement that he wasn't at liberty to delineate his exact relationship with the Joint Base Cape Cod outfit. When asked what JBCC gets in return for accommodating him "on a moment's notice", Oscar had remarked that he wasn't at liberty to specify. It was a response that stuck with Paul and occasionally pounded his head like a migraine.

But he let it all pass for the time being and was driven to the air terminal, arriving at his home on the Cape before eleven p.m., U.S. time. It was about when he'd told Sylvie he'd arrive and asked that she wait up for him.

Nearly all the lights of their house were on and upon entering, she latched onto him—once

more as though she'd never see him again. They said little, but their embrace felt competitive.

Finally, Sylvie asked that he not summarize the Japan visit until she relayed some bad news to him. She checked her watch.

"Darling," she began, "I received a phone call from Calabria about four hours ago."

"Calabria?"

"Yes. It was from a man who called himself Fabio."

She referred to a pad that was on the kitchen table. "He said you might remember him if I threw in the names Gino and Sal."

"Yeah, I know all three. What did he want?"

"To tell you that the Rocco Stratta you saw there has been murdered."

"Murdered?" Paul could hardly pronounce the word. "Murdered how?"

"Shot. Five times in all. Someone saw the body in a trash can behind his barber shop. He was stuffed in headfirst with only the tips of his shoes showing. The police were called but no arrests were made."

Paul began to pace, faster than usual. *What the hell. Are things caving in or am I? There goes our Mob connection. I'll have to turn elsewhere—maybe to Fabio.*

But despite the news, he understood the mentality of gangsters. He believed that either word had leaked out that Rocco was quitting mob activity entirely or—and this increased his sweat three-fold—the wrong people had noticed that he was recently there and had left the shop smiling.

Did it create a certain impression, one that would call for murder in Italy and who knows what in the United States?

It took the time for Sylvie to prepare some tea for Paul to calm down. He did. Partially.

"Ah, the underworld. We've got to accept that sort of thing," he said to her, as if trying to convince himself. "Pure, but not simple. Let's move ahead though."

Before they crawled into bed, he gave a snapshot version of what went on in Japan.

"You know, Syl," he said, "there's no telling what's in store—how all of this will pan out."

He pulled the sheet up tightly around his neck. "Don't you get the feeling that things are happening in stages?"

"I hope there aren't too many left," she replied.

Chapter 11

And then there was the Dolores Sousa issue—the histarian he would solicit to work for Marlene. It was something he'd let slide, along with touching base with his longtime friend, Dr. David Brooks.

How to proceed?

First, he'd have to introduce Marlene to Dolores. And it would have to be by phone, because he wasn't about to make another trip to Buenos Aires.

He phoned Marlene early Monday morning, was greeted warmly and was about to remind her about Dolores when she herself … Marlene … brought up the name.

"Do you have her number so I can call her? I was so invigorated after speaking to you last time,

Paul, that I can't wait to get going on my Evita project. Dolores sounds like just the person to help out. Does she work around here?"

"Yeah, I believe it's called the San Telmo Market. She specializes in antiques."

"I'll try her home number first—if you have it—and if there's no answer, I'll try her there."

Paul was stunned by her complete willingness to cooperate. So much so that he pressed the receiver closer to his ear.

At the same time, he suspected that something was afoul, but he let it slide, reminding himself that nothing seemed clear-cut lately.

He checked his phone listings of histarians, gave her the home and work numbers, and followed with a request. "If you reach her and arrangements are made, will you call me back to tell me?"

"Right after it happens … if it does."

It apparently did, for Marlene soon notified him that excellent arrangements had been made for the two women to confer daily.

A month before, Dolores had changed her San Telmo schedule to half a day with weekends off, leaving plenty of time now for personal contact plus for introducing Marlene to important individuals.

One thing Paul had underlined in his last talk with Dolores was that Evita had preferred to offer favors—monetary, political or sexual if need be—to people of little wealth or power, practically ignoring the affluent.

Whereas, in Marlene's case, he would recommend that the privileged be considered as well. It would provide her with some early and additional popularity.

Soon after Marlene's call, the phone rang again. It was Paul's new confidante and informant. She spoke of the arrangement in great detail, but also of her willingness to phone Paul on a regular basis.

"Since I take it she's not completely … what do you up north say? … she's not completely out of the woods yet, anything that sounds or looks suspicious—well, you'll hear from me as often as necessary."

"Morning, noon or night. Thanks, Dolores."

He had no idea why but suddenly the Marlene/Napoleon comparison slipped into his mind and he decided to share it with her.

"I have an uneasy feeling," he said, "that Marlene will have to be observed more closely than we originally thought."

"I already have proof of that, Paul," Dolores retorted.

"Oh, now what?"

"Well, we had an agreement that I would be kept informed of where she'd like to visit and vice versa. And what did she go and do? She went to this big publishing firm without telling me and refused to state how she made out. I happen to know the chief operating officer there and he's close-mouthed about it too, which makes me wonder about what's behind the secrecy."

"Prostitution?"

"That would be my guess. She's certainly a strange and unreliable creature."

"Yeah, I agree, and I don't like it one bit. But all I can conclude is that we see if she begins to cooperate over the next few days. And if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out, that's all."

After they hung up, Paul assessed the value of a Dolores Sousa and came to the conclusion that she was totally invaluable in her present role—all aspects of it: responsibility, accountability, reliability. In fact, he would keep her in mind for future cases.

Future cases!

It was as if he wanted to end the current turmoil in favor of one that was not as confusing.

When it came to Dr. David Brooks, once a practicing physician and treasure hunter himself—

but now a part-time law enforcement investigator—he and Paul shared their experiences like brothers and often assisted one another in difficult cases.

Paul called David, who resided in Hollings, Connecticut, and they agreed to meet halfway between their respective homes, at a Howard Johnson's Restaurant on the Massachusetts Turnpike.

As was expected this time around, Paul did most of the talking, commenting briefly on prostitution, pirates and Perónism but then switching to Sarin Day and the need for enormous coordination to ward it off.

Twice he mentioned that since the seven opposition leaders had to be simultaneously killed the day before, every minute mattered. For if a single pirate heard of an ill-timed release of non-dispersible gas, he might back off and the whole operation could become a complete mess. Paul was at a loss to describe resultant consequences, but he tried.

"Who knows what the result would be, really. This is big time stuff involving most of the world and would require big time coordination. If they were to have that kind of coordination in giving their signal, then we need to have it too."

David was focusing on Paul's every word but when he had a chance, he said, "I see your point and agree wholeheartedly, but I have an idea. Let's return to the two paranoids you were talking about before: Napoleon and that … Marlene, is it?"

"Yeah, Marlene."

"I can think of another person we've encountered who we thought was paranoid, too. But he turned out not to be and became very successful. Remember? The former president of Radonia.

"He once announced publicly that he hoped his son could succeed him. But reporters misunderstood because he had no son. What he said was, and I think he wrote it as a manifesto of some sort … was that if he had a son, this is what he would say to him. But he was really using the so-called manifesto to criticize politicians."

"Obviously Juan Carlos Saltanban," Paul said.

"Yes. As you know, because you visited him some time back, he now lives and works out of Gibraltar, a stone's throw from the Rock."

"How well I remember. But I think you've hit upon something. He's into telecommunications and cybernetics." Paul was getting inspired. "We may need some form of high-tech to have the precision we both agreed upon. But, you know, I'd

really like to reread that manifesto plus listen to his CD audio before we decide to consult with him. I have them both back home in Falmouth."

"I have the originals at home too."

"I'll come to Hollings with you," Paul said.

"Really? When?"

"Now. I have the time. You?"

"For this? Yes, I have the time. I think it's that important."

"I'll follow you there, then."

Trying to sound apologetic, Paul added, "The originals are probably in better shape than the way things turn out when I store them away."

David's longtime friend and now fiancée, Kathy Dupre, wasn't at home when he and Paul arrived there. It was more than a modest home, but not enormous. Paul had been there as many times as David had been at Paul's. Often, Sylvie and Kathy attended their powwows and had contributed their fair share of suggestions.

On arrival, David went immediately to his study and had no trouble locating a thick folder labeled "Saltanban" and the CD audio with a similar label.

"Here's what he had written for his made-up son," David said. "I'll read it out loud, as the reporters probably did to each other years ago. And then, of course, they botched things up."

MANIFESTO FOR NEW WORLD ORDER

My beloved son, Luis. You have received a legacy that I began many years before you were born. Handle it wisely with the skills you inherited from me.

And be careful of ordinary politicians. When they speak, do you not for a moment know they are politicians? Certain corporations try to buy election results and the beneficiaries are favored politicians. If a "good" politician must be good in the art of compromise, then truth, honesty and loyalty are compromised.

Contrariwise, if a politician shuns lies, deception and betrayal, he or she can achieve only ordinary status—a stranger to the inner circle and unable to accomplish much. Thus, the stuff of politics is such that it attracts scoundrels or eventually creates them.

But none of this pertains to you, Luis. You are different. You are my son. Be my son. Be strong. The struggle will take years, if not generations. But you will have

the temperament, individuality and determination of your father.

"Now I ask you, Paul, isn't it ridiculous for people to believe his so-called son isn't a ploy to get his message across? And, on top of that, isn't the criticism of politicians even more pertinent today than back then, when Saltanban released this bit?"

"Yeah, absolutely. As a matter of fact, who says he released it to the public? Maybe he was just fooling around in writing it the way he did and a copy of it got lost. Maybe it fell out of his briefcase or someone grabbed it from a pile of his papers at a news conference."

"Well, anyway, that's that," David said. "Now, here's the CD and I'll play it. It's the same one both of us have heard before. But maybe we can learn something that can help now and that didn't mean too much to us originally. You'll no doubt recognize my views, but I'm the one asking the questions. As I asked you last time, see if his speaking without contractions irritates you as much as it irritates me:"

So before you went into politics, you were in telecommunications. How did you get started?

It is a long story. As a boy, I was always taking radios apart. Later, I became an aficionado of the history of communications. Even in high school, I knew that would be my field someday, and in the meantime, I read all I could about the history.

I do not mean to bore you, but at the beginning, the first form of long distance was what? Smoke signals.

Then some people called the Sumerians developed the first known system of writing; the Romans started the first newspaper; and the English introduced the first pencil.

Next, the French developed photographs and three of your Americans—Morse, Bell and Edison—invented the telegraph, the telephone and the phonograph. The radio came in there somewhere and I think a Canadian was involved.

As I have said, Samuel Morse invented the telegraph in the early 19th century. He later developed the Morse Code. The telegraph was a very important instrument during your Civil War for both the press

and the armies of both sides. And it helped at your stock exchange and at your railroads.

What can I mention about the telephone? Bell discovered it in the late 19th century. And you know, a funny thing. One never thinks of it, but at the beginning, there were no switchboards. They came during the next year. Then dial phones, service between countries, and the technology I am most interested in commercial satellites. Think of these as relay stations. But I have said enough about these devices. I am afraid I ramble once I begin. Some other time, perhaps, I might discuss the radio and the phonograph.

And so, you see, it is all related—all these forms—and all the countries, somehow many of them wanted to—how do you say it—wanted to get into the act.

Anyway, my friends, we are now up to the things I am most interested in: they are plans about telecommunications. Advanced telecommunications.

Meaning what?

My plans about telecommunications? Forgive me, but I shall become more technical. Bell Laboratories discovered the transistor; Xerox the copier; and Corning Glass the first optical fiber that could be used for long-range communication. Fiber optics uses a laser to send signals through glass or plastic.

The transistor, which replaced the vacuum tube, is a tiny device that controls the flow of electric current in TV sets, radios, computers and ... but there I go again. I am sorry.

I spoke about satellites already. Telstar is a satellite that was launched in early 1960. It relayed telephone calls, television shows and other communications between your country and Europe.

My company dealt with fiber optics and satellites primarily, but I have recently become interested in cybernetics. In point of fact, three months ago, I completed a book on the subject, and I am anxiously awaiting word from the publisher. I want to advance knowledge about how information is transmitted by the control mechanism of machines and the nervous system of living things.

Like animals?

Yes, animals ... humans. Yes, anything living. But I believe I have rambled on too long. You asked me the time and I made you a watch!

Nonsense. That was most informative. One last question though. What about computers? Where do you think they're taking us?

I am concerned. The Internet with its encrypted messages can be such a tool of secrecy that crime of every kind will become electronic and will take place in an instant once the decision is made. Drug operations, fraud, embezzlement, prostitution, blackmail, government conspiracies, military coups, murder. Much is possible now, but it can get worse. In the matter of terrorism, for example.

And even in business or education or government work, face-to-face meetings may no longer occur, and I think much will be lost there. It is really a sword with a double edge. Email. The Internet—an

Information Super-Highway, but one that is filled with—what are they called. Potholes?

It is the secrecy that is my worry. Split second. Cheap. Yes, cyberspace is good but can become evil. I am afraid this hemisphere and perhaps the whole planet has an analog intelligence dealing with a digital threat. That is how I see it.

Now back to cybernetics. It is a science that deals with how humans and machines can be similar and how controls can work in both. That is basically what my book is about.

Would you mind explaining that again?

Controls or feedback. I believe that eventually we can build a machine to imitate human behavior but, until that time, we should concentrate on controlling that behavior.

What's the title of your book?

Mechanization: The Alternative to Cloning.

It sounds very ambitious.

Not really. My premise is that machines should be able to accomplish more than the simple mechanization of work. After all, it is humans who are designing the machines.

And?

And through feedback or control, the machines can become more human. I have chapters in there on institutional conditioning, on biofeedback in medicine and even on transcendental meditation.

There. Now we're talking.

Now we are talking?

Yes, that's what I'm interested in. Transcendental meditation. TM. In my medical field, there're so many patients, say, with chronic infection who also have high blood pressure or asthma or migraines. If we could only teach them to deal more effectively with their autonomic

functions. I know there are centers for this sort of thing—stress reduction techniques and the like—and they usually do a good job. But not always. Do you think it can be improved upon?

Yes, I do.

Could you come speak to our state medical society one of these days?

It would be my pleasure. If I could help someone, I would be honored.

In individual ways, both Paul and David stated that the man "knows his stuff".

"He may be the exact guy to help us here," Paul said, with a ring of fervency to his words.

David was less convinced. "If there are forty-three or fifty histarians who have to perform simultaneously, will cybernetics be the answer?" he asked. "We need proper timing—exact timing. And that's where this guy can be a savior or a traitor."

"I vote we give him a call right now," Paul said.

"Alright. You do the talking. If you get stuck, hand the phone to me. He knows us both."

David found Saltanban's phone number, Paul placed the call and after bilateral pleasantries had been exchanged, he gave a description of his assignment, what parts of it had been accomplished, and what needed to be done regarding Sarin Day. He spent considerable time on the various aspects of that coming day and on reviewing the features of the Tokyo subway events years before. But he concentrated mainly on the nail biter coming up.

"You certainly take on the most involved jobs," Saltanban said. "but I can not believe the timing."

"What's that mean?"

"That I have just finished—and I know perfected—a project I have been working on for about two years. It is ready to be put into use and I am certain it will satisfy your need. It is a form of commercial satellite or relay station and I have already given it a name. It is my 'Synchronous Action Device,' or SAD for short. It is not really a device, but the word 'plan' does not appeal to me as much. To be honest, I prefer the name 'model' for it. But for now, let us skip much of a description of it. Could you come here so I can show it to you?"

Paul gave the request practically no consideration before responding. His voice became

stronger. "*Absolutely*," he said. "And I'll bring David Brooks along with me." He looked over at David who flashed a thumb's up sign.

"The doctor? Fine. It has been some time since we last got together. Incidentally, how much time do we have before this Sarin Day is scheduled? Do you know?"

"I was told in 'weeks' but I don't know if that means two or more."

"Good. We have time then, for I must attend an important conference not too far from Paris over the next two days—in Rouen—but after that, I will be free right here. It is the same office that you are familiar with."

Paul thought there was a technical disruption of service during the ensuing several seconds before Saltanban uttered the reassuring words: "But really, my friend, the unique feature of my device is that once we set up its various monitors, it will notify us if the day is correct or not. Therefore we will know when we must respond.

"As you stated, that means we then go to work and get prepared the day *before* Sarin Day. What does all this mean? That somehow we must be told when the Day will be—and next we use my device to verify it. In other words, being told when the Day will be is not good enough. There may be errors surrounding that, deliberate or accidental.

My SAD will tell us if there are errors or not. And it would even verify the names of people who might have leading roles in their plans. I cannot divulge how, but it can do so."

"Even the name of the overall leader?"

"Yes, but I would have to have the name to begin with."

"So if we supply the names--if we ever find out—you can verify if they're correct?"

"Yes, my model could."

"I think you should name it your 'verification model'."

"Well, that is what it is."

Paul concluded the conversation with, "Okay then, Juan, it's Monday here right now; let's make it Friday afternoon, your time."

"I will be waiting. Let me give you my smartphone number, just in case there is a change in timing, Paul."

"No need. I have it."

Chapter 12

After Paul and David shared a firm handshake—their flight arrangements having been agreed upon for Friday—Paul returned to his home on the Cape. He fixed himself a cup of tea and downed it in hardly half the time he usually did before realizing the scope of the problems looming ahead.

Where to turn next? So many things dangling. Am I rushing? Am I procrastinating? Forgetting? Minimizing? Where are the appropriate solutions? Are there any? Should the problems be ranked?

If quandaries could speak out, his would scream for help.

However, three things were certain: Sarin Day headed the list; he still trusted Saltanban; and

he had three or four days to iron out some of the problems. At least to get a better hold on them. Then the trip to Gibraltar would arrive.

And the trilogy of prostitution, pirates and Perónism, entered his mind.

As things currently stood, what would he have to concede in determining if there was a pirate-Mob connection? Or, regarding Argentine politics, how much would it interfere with what Marlene intended to do in Buenos Aires? Even with Dolores looking on, could he help there?

Wedged into his quasi-negative thinking was that perhaps it was time to confer with the histarian he'd discussed matters with time and time again. Especially when he felt stymied. Constable Thatcher Drinkwell from St. Helena. A place in no-man's land—difficult to reach, exhausting to return home from. A place he would never travel to again. But Drinkwell had recently softened, agreeing to discuss even the most pressing subjects by phone.

He offers sound advice and has often soothed my mind. Well, I need both. Maybe the soothing more than anything else. Soothing? Unwinding? Whatever.

Paul searched through his satchel and found something lighthearted for a change: Drinkwell's short dissertation on birds. He recalled the gist of the constable's initial remarks:

The serious matters—the reason you're here—we'll get to soon. But I should point out what many say about me: Talk, talk, talk. Birds, birds, birds. I'm finished with my talking. Now for the birds, and I'll make it short. Anyone else—not as busy as you—wouldn't be so lucky. Yesiree, *The Birds of St. Helena*—that's the title of my new book. I don't tend to the little darlings; I just know about them, made a study of them, their history, their habits and so on. So I must dispense with that first.

It was as if he was possessed by a compulsion that had to be satisfied, an overture to a symphony. Without consulting notes, he had spoken with authority, and his voice deepened.

Paul then began reading from the dissertation, almost immediately relieved of some stress—like an iota's worth:

Not many seabirds here. They shun us and I don't know why. There are plenty off Ascension but we only have Tropic birds and Black and Brown Noddies. Some call the Fairy Tern a seabird—I don't because it

nests not only on cliffs but also in trees and on some of our buildings. You may spot some … they're interesting birds with translucent wings and eyes that seem too big for their heads.

As for land birds, most seem to fly around Jamestown primarily. I maintain they're social creatures—they like to be around people. We have ten species here, only ten in all, like waxbills, the Common Myna, the Malagasy Fody and Swainson's Canary. But my favorite is the Wirebird. You can't miss it. It prefers to live on a ridge above Longwood House, but some come down and race around the grounds. They have long spindly legs and no way will you catch one—they're too quick and fast. They'd rather run than fly. I would have named them Ground Wirebirds.

Well, I didn't get into migration or when and how certain birds were released here and decided to stay, and don't worry, I won't. In fact, that's enough on that.

Paul turned the page and, this time, read Drinkwell's quoted material on Napoleon:

The only reason I want to read it, Drinkwell wrote, is that I never had it printed out … It is still in my hieroglyphic scrawl. And the reason I'd like you to hear it is because it creates a mood and, what shall I call it? A poignant picture of one of the great personalities in history.

Forgive me if I sound biased, and certainly you, Paul, know the character of the man you've scrutinized, but … perhaps this might help explain why the emperor behaved as he did. Not in wars, mind you, but off the battlefield.

I took this account from the diary of the Comte de Las Cases. He was in the small entourage that accompanied Napoleon into exile. The Comte wrote:

We were all assembled around the emperor, and he was recapitulating these facts with warmth:

"For what infamous treatment are we reserved? This is the anguish of death. To injustice and violence they now add insult and protracted torment. If I were so hateful to them, why did they not get rid of me? A few musket balls in my heart or my head would have done the business, and there would at least have been some energy in

the crime. Were it not for you, and above all for your wives, I would receive nothing from them but the pay of a private soldier.

"How can the monarchs of Europe permit the sacred character of sovereignty to be violated in my person? Do they not see that they are, with their own hands, working their own destruction at St. Helena?"

"I entered their capitols victorious and, had I cherished such sentiments, what would have become of them? They styled me their brother, and I had become so by the choice of the people, the sanction of victory, the character of religion, and the alliances of their policy and their blood. Do they imagine that the good sense of nations is blind to their conduct? And what do they expect from it? At all events, make your complaints, gentlemen; let indignant Europe hear from them. Complaints from me would be beneath my dignity and character; I must either command or be silent."

"Powerful," Drinkwell wrote. "At least I think so. He was certainly controversial but I admired the man. I felt sorry for

him—the way he ended up—though many other people didn't. Not at all. Oh well, let's proceed. I've editorialized and given you my pet stuff long enough. Thank you for your patience."

After having read it for the umpteenth time over many years, Paul looked around to be sure he was alone and then said aloud: "And I should complain?"

However, it was just the medicine he needed. He was more confident that, regardless of the many related and unrelated problems ahead, he would be able to confront them all with reason, strength and sensibility.

And since the trip to Gibraltar was days away, he had time to brush up on the region, something he hadn't done on his last-minute trip there four years ago. Certain that there was nothing relevant in his satchel, he reverted to his home private library and found all reference books that were stored there regarding the territory and especially the Rock. He picked out the thickest and most recently written books about it, settled back in his favorite chair and skimmed through them.

But it was from the Internet that he gathered most of the information he wanted: Gibraltar's history, its long-held and ongoing tribulations

regarding ownership (England's or Spain's?), and its status now as a tributary. He practically memorized what he'd read, downloaded some of it and inserted it into his satchel:

> The Rock of Gibraltar is a limestone promontory of the British overseas territory of Gibraltar. The territory has a population of about thirty-thousand. Most residents are descended from Italian, Maltese, Portuguese and Spanish settlers. Others are descended from British military personnel who were formally stationed there. Almost all inhabitants live in apartments in the town of Gibraltar and the workers are primarily employed by its government, by dockyards or in jobs related to the tourist industry.
>
> As for the Rock itself, it is nearly fourteen-hundred-feet high and is located off the southwestern tip of Europe on the Iberian Peninsula. It is considered Crown property of the United Kingdom, forms a peninsula that juts out into the Strait of Gibraltar and borders Spain. Occupying nearly all of Gibraltar's 2.3 square miles, most of its uppermost area is covered by a nature reserve where about two-hundred-

fifty Barbary macaques reside. These animals—the only wild population of monkeys in Europe—along with a labyrinthine network of tunnels—attract numerous tourists every year. The underground tunnels are known as the Galleries and the Great Siege Tunnels.

These underground tunnels have a unique history. They were first dug in the late seventeen-hundreds. The British commander wanted to create the potential for cannon fire upon Spanish batteries in the area below the north face of the Rock. The siege lasted about four years and during that span, the British had constructed six such embrasures and mounted four cannons.

The so-called Galleries were constructed later on. Comprised of an entire system of halls, passages and embrasures measuring nearly a thousand feet long, they too are a popular tourist attraction. From that location, visitors are able to view the Bay of Gibraltar, the isthmus and Spain itself.

All told, the Rock contains over one-hundred caves. The most prominent and the most visited is St. Michael's Cave,

situated halfway up the western slope of the Rock. Within it is another area called Cathedral Cave, once thought to be bottomless and therefore an underground link to Africa. This has never been substantiated. Cathedral Cave now serves frequently as an auditorium for concerts, ballet and drama presentations. The beauty of its crystallized surroundings draws raves from its numerous attendees. They are particularly drawn to a centuries-old stalagmite that became so heavy, it dropped and landed on its side at the far end of the chamber.

From a military standpoint, it was fortified by over thirty-thousand British soldiers and sailors during WWII, thus playing a key role in the defense of shipping routes in the Mediterranean. In 1942, during the war, the Allies launched an attack from Gibraltar against German and Italian forces in North Africa. And as recently as 1997, it was revealed that Britain had concocted a secret plan to hide service men in the Rock's tunnels in case the Germans captured it. It was named "Operation Tracer" and had the radio capability to report all enemy movement.

A six-man team remained under cover for over two years before they were disbanded and returned to civilian life.

Such a history of sieges and military action is responsible for the popular saying "solid as the Rock of Gibraltar." Technically speaking, it is therefore not based on the solidity of the Rock itself; rather on the action and dedication of the servicemen assigned to it.

Paul's immediate reaction to what he had extracted was to recall the last time he was in Gibraltar four years ago. Of all the information he had just summarized, the description of Cathedral Cave was especially depressing for it was through an iron gate behind the fallen stalagmite that he was led by several captors. They abandoned him there, assuring him they'd soon return. But they never realized that he had had experience in "caving", which included the negotiation of pitches, squeezes and water. It was long ago, but at the time he had considered such activity as sheer enjoyment, much like mountaineering or diving.

In the early moments of that captivity, he recalled a combination of anxiety and resourcefulness, but after a quick evaluation of his surroundings, he knew what had to be done, despite

its dangers. He was enveloped in a montage of giant crystals and rock formations, most of which he could identify; the obvious stalactites and stalagmites, helictites, cave pearls and baconstrips formed from multiple dripstones and soda straws. This familiarity alone gave him confidence as he proceeded to negotiate rocky projections and uneven terrain.

But in the semi-darkness, he had to move slowly and deliberately, avoiding slippery footing, jagged projections and giant spider webs. Through it all, however, it wasn't any of these that disturbed him the most; rather it was the extreme drop in temperature that not only slowed him down but began to discourage him. For he had remembered the days when he often volunteered to search for missing mountain climbers and was introduced to the phenomenon of "paradoxical undressing", a state of mind that could lead to death. A dead man found in freezing surroundings, but undressed! He later learned that such individuals had experienced hallucinations and subjective feelings of warmth during the terminal stages of the process. In addition, their bodies were discovered in protected locations—under a bed, behind a couch, *behind a boulder*. But Paul's ordeal never went that far and though he eventually escaped, he was still plagued by its memory.

Once again, he asked himself why—in the middle of a blistering assignment—he would turn to such disparate thoughts and information. And, once again, he came up with the same answer: it was a leveling off mechanism to provide a moment or two of psychological relief.

Chapter 13

Paul thought the area in and around the Rock of Gibraltar looked the same as when he and David were there well over four years ago. The same applied to Saltanban's office building a stone's throw away.

And, upon doing some checking beforehand, Paul had learned that the same antipathy existed between Britain and Spain regarding ownership of the land there, including the Rock. Britain still possessed the rights. Not that it mattered to him in the long run, unless questions of extradition of Saltanban's *Synchronous Action Device* were to come into the picture.

All the way over from the States, the two of them examined the pros and cons of what Juan Carlos had said.

At one point, David complained that Paul was doing all the talking—most of it in Saltanban's favor, ranting and raving about the man's capabilities.

"Sorry," Paul eventually said. "I apologize. I realize I sometimes go overboard on things. You know that best, David."

"Yes, and, make no mistake, I understand the importance of all this."

But Paul continued to monopolize the discussion, even referring to the time he went on and on defending himself in a court procedure by saying, "Your Honor, may I say that what now looks like gluttony on my part will turn out to be necessity."

It was the phrase that had won David over and upon landing at Gib Airport, he had finally joined Paul in the intensity of his expectations.

They walked toward Saltanban's complex on Catalan Bay, the last of several whose previously blue-gray exteriors had been painted since they were there last. Each was now a glistening green that smarted Paul's eyes so much that he had to turn away as they came upon a familiar set of ebony

doors. This time, he expected to see what was unexpected before.

On the inside balcony, however, he was shocked to find that the expanse of interconnecting rooms below them had nearly doubled—to perhaps one hundred. Each room measured about thirty-feet square, had an open entryway and was still occupied by either a male or female worker at a computer who never looked up to acknowledge their presence. Even when one rose stiffly to complete a task at the other end of the room. The only change in their appearance was that each wore either a green shirt or blouse whose backside bore an emblem depicting a black silhouette of the Rock.

The contents of each room once again were identical, none having changed over the years: a beech-colored swivel chair with a waterfall seat edge and contoured backrest; teak side tables that held computers, printers and copying machines; a gigantic shredder; and, in the center, an elongated table with a glass top below which a powder-coated steel frame rested on numerous cubic pillars.

Paul was impressed all over again. *The very same work bays. The same kind of work force. They act like robots. Is he somehow controlling them with his so-called Synchronous Action Device*? He suppressed a smile.

Suddenly Saltanban appeared out of nowhere. "Welcome, my friends," he said, enunciating the words with passion.

Paul said, "Good to be here, Juan."

David echoed the sentiment.

They shook hands.

"Come... come into my studio," Juan said, leading them down a long corridor, its left wall composed of solid glass from floor to ceiling. The view was that of plush meadowland and attractive hillside homes.

They stepped into the center of a triangle of rooms. Juan called the right one his main studio and signaled them toward it as he scurried around the men to open its door.

Paul looked over at the entrance to the other two and noticed that the door to the middle room was partially open but that of the far left was closed and had a steel beam across its front with a padlock at its end.

The studio felt crowded due to the many bookshelves and several work tables containing pile upon pile of papers and pads. There was just room for a small desk and three chairs. Juan positioned them in a circle and took one. The others sat cautiously on either side of him, unsure of their firmness. They proved firm.

Four years' time had done little to change Juan's appearance except for a goatee that was now totally gray and a stoop that was more pronounced. In his mid-fifties and a six-footer, he'd remained as hefty as a bar bouncer with a head of hair that was curly, dense and solid black—no doubt dyed.

As before, he wore square, wire-rimmed glasses that were attached to a red and blue chain. It looped around his neck and appeared out of place.

On each finger was the usual gold signet ring, a "J" in script on the left as you faced him and a "C" on the right. David once recalled asking him why there was not simply a "JC" on one ring. And the response was, "No, no. These are for 'Juan Carlos'. Your way is reserved for someone more important than I."

Juan waited for a comment from either visitor but, with none forthcoming, said, "Let me tell you ... how is it you Americans say it? ... 'right off the bat' ... that I have unsettling news. Yesterday, I received a call from Rouen. Why they did not tell me this when I was just there for the conference, I will never know. They now claim there is some kind of reason for me to return there. But they would not elaborate by phone. Will you come with me?"

Paul and David looked at one another. Each shrugged and made a helpless gesture toward his tiny suitcase. Paul had left his satchel at home.

"I guess so," he said, "but if we're to travel that distance, can you share a little of what your contact has in mind? And then, might we stay here awhile to run the names of some people by you and ask if you know them?"

Saltanban's response was Bela Lugosi-like: "But of course." He then gazed off into space.

David nodded toward Paul who repeated the first part of his question a different way. "So they want you there why?"

Saltanban shook his head from side to side. He then spoke slowly.

"It was a woman who called. She said she was my contact's secretary there in Rouen. He is the one facilitating everything about demonstrating my model. In case you are wondering, here in Gibraltar is where the construction of it is permitted, but not its demonstration and use until agreed upon by a committee that happens to reside in France. He is chairman of that committee and a member of the staff on a river boat—the *Aquatic Sonata*—and wants me to call on him at one of their docking ports on the River Seine. His name is Louis Levesque. I understand I need not bring my model along even though it is very light to carry.

You shall see in a minute. But he … they … whatever … he wants me to bring copies of its design plans with me. I have them in a box, which is heavier than the model. The woman said that one cannot trust the mail or any other delivery service, and that is why he wants me to hand them to him personally. She said the visit would not take long. He just wants to meet me, ask a question or two, and receive the plans together with a list of my model's intended purposes."

Saltanban seemed to have been wound up to talk and continued on.

"I do not know fully what all this means but I shall follow what I am told. That is, by authorities I have researched, and they seem legitimate."

He took some time to clear his throat.

"Who gives that committee such authority?" Paul asked. "Or better still, why have they become involved? They sound like interlopers."

"Inter … what?"

"Interlopers. Thrusting themselves into the affairs of others."

"No, no! I had to obtain a license to patent my model and was referred to them."

"I see," David said. "Makes sense, but why do you want us along?"

"In a strange way, to guarantee that I am authentic."

Paul was puzzled but let the subject ride. Instead he inquired, "And which is heavier—the box or its contents?"

"The contents. The plans." Saltanban appeared weary, even defiant.

"You mean the papers are heavier than what you're designing?"

"Yes, you have it now. Do not forget—I have been working on this for two years. Probably more designing and redesigning than constructing."

All was quiet except for a sudden clap of thunder. Paul was the only one who didn't flinch.

The host resumed the conversation. "When we are there, I must run the Sarin Day deadline by him."

This time *Paul* flinched. "What?" he exclaimed. "Please don't."

"But I must. He may ask what the main purpose of my model is and I would have to level with him. Getting ready to head off Sarin Day is the most immediate purpose."

"Juan … please! We've got to keep it all a secret—or word might get around. We might fail and the world might end. Pure and simple. The intended purpose? Make up one or two others, like the capacity to prevent great damage to ships, airplanes and so forth."

Juan hesitated, then countered with an acid-sounding, "We shall see."

Paul believed it would have been counterproductive to continue his appeal and asked if he might switch to bringing up some names.

"Just three or four," he said. "Tell us if you know of them, if you don't mind. I'll start with Shoko Asahara."

"Asahara? Who does not? Way back, he led the gas attack in Tokyo. But I have never met him."

"Okay. Tomi Hoshi?"

"Do not know of him."

"Marlene Kesler?"

"Do not know."

"Larry Albino?"

"Do not know."

"Good enough," Paul said.

Both he and David remained silent, hoping next to see the Synchronous Action Device.

It was as if Saltanban was reading their minds for he rose and said, "Come, let us go see the model."

He led them to the door of the far left room, removed the padlock and lifted away the steel beam.

Inside, on a table in the center of a small room, was a wooden box that was perhaps two feet

square with a sliding front panel and a golden handle at the top. The rest of the room was barren.

"I secure my model in here," he said, "but I work on it nearly every day in my workshop next door."

Paul, more expectant than David, said, "Frankly, Juan, I'm surprised at how small it is."

"Small but intricate," Juan said. "Here, I shall show you."

He slid the panel aside and what appeared was the interior of a shiny machine containing row upon row of miniature screws, nuts, bolts, washers, switches, ball-bearings, dials, wires, clips, hooks, pins, needles, knobs, levers, tubing, eyelets, springs, brads, clasps, staples, hoses, chains, sprockets, cables, valves, blades, belts, bushings, camshafts, drills, rods, adhesives, sealants, grommets, pumps, compressors, wheels, shafts, hammers, buttons, fasteners, discs, latches, braces, tacks, hinges, cords, locks, and plugs. Even elastic bands. The rows were tightly arranged and interconnected.

The model was the size of an ordinary sewing machine or a small diesel engine and at the top was a shaft through which larger metal devices could be seen.

All Paul could say was, "Christ, it looks like it could do *anything*!"

David nodded and scratched the back of his head.

Saltanban beamed. "It will, if I order it to," he said. "I know I told you over the phone that I would demonstrate it to you, but I then realized I still have one or two more connections to make before I can do that. However, I can tell you one thing: my invention here is entirely unique. Space is the key. Right now as I speak, commercialization of space is changing at a rapid rate. What do I mean by commercialization in this context? Nothing more than satellite radio, satellite television and satellite navigation systems.

"The word 'artificial' is often tied to the word 'satellite' to differentiate it from natural satellites, which are objects that orbit a planet. The earth's moon, for example, is a natural satellite."

Saltanban paused to stare at his visitors as if expecting some reaction. But Paul and David were close-mouthed, although Paul nearly voiced his amazement of his host's knowledge.

Juan picked up where he left off. "So we have satellites and cybernetics. My system puts them together and I call it 'satelnetics'. In other words, it has features of both. When these features are combined to form my satelnetics, not only are their individual efficiencies improved but also— and mainly— their accuracies. I must repeat to you,

however, that it cannot determine the exact day. I would need help with that. Who will provide it—I do not know at this point.

"As I have explained once before, all my model can do is verify the day we are given. But that is extremely important. So as such—that is, in our obtaining help in learning when the day will be and my calling on the model to verify it—I assure you there will be no error in determining the exact beginning of Sarin Day."

Paul and David's facial expressions mimicked one another—each was totally mesmerized, and also delighted.

Saltanban slid the panel shut as if he felt they had viewed it long enough. Then he led them out of the room and back toward his studio.

Once there, he asked, "You could not take guns with you on your flight here, correct?"

"Yeah, unfortunately correct," Paul answered.

Then before we leave for Rouen, I will furnish you both with one."

With that, he opened a double desk drawer and withdrew two Kahr K9 pistols, a container of ammunition, two ankle holsters and two tactical folding knives from a tangle of similar items.

He handed them to the men, saying, "Here, just in case."

Paul accepted them with thanks but was dumbfounded, wondering why they would need guns for what he hoped would be a brief visit to Rouen before returning home.

He looked the Kahs over as Saltanban commented, "Yes, they are made in your country.

"Now I have some important things to tend to here," he said, "so we will leave in the morning. I can take you to a nearby hotel or you can stay overnight right here. I have a room that has three or four cots and a shower; and for dinners, I can have them sent over."

"I vote to stay right here," Paul said.

David nodded.

"Before I forget, Juan," Paul said. "I'm leery of discussing anything about Sarin Day by phone. Any suggestions?"

"Yes, yes. It is simple. I will provide you with a special number you can call when you need to. It will be me at the other end—and only me. No one can listen in, so all conversation will be secret. It is one of my old satelnetic inventions and I assure you, it is foolproof. I call it 'the cryptic line'."

"And I even have one where *you* will be at the other end. I knew how secretive you wanted to be, so I already devised one for you, too. Here—the first one is to call me and the second one is to call

you. It will ring at your usual number, but the line will be a secret one."

"That's a relief! You're something, Juan."

"And if there is … or will be … anyone else who should have the number, give it to them—but do tell me about it."

"I understand."

With that, Saltanban wrote down the numbers of the cryptic line on a piece of paper and handed it to Paul, who put it in his zippered side pocket.

The host then led them to a windowless room. Indeed, it was empty of everything except the cots and shower. But all linens and towels appeared clean.

He left with a genuinely hearty farewell until morning.

Meanwhile, Paul continued to wonder why the guns were given to them. He shuffled reason after reason through his mind, but coming up with nothing rational, decided to dismiss another knotty subject in favor of phoning Sylvie at Wood's Hole.

"Unfortunately, we have to accompany our friend to Rouen, over near Paris," he said. "Leaving in the morning. You okay?"

"Yes, but what's it all about?"

"I'll explain when I get home. Have you corrected the intercom problem there?"

"Well, I contacted a certain electrical company, but nobody's come here yet."

"Damn! I'll bet even *this* call is being monitored."

Chapter 14

The private jet flight to the Beauvais-Tille Airport and the bus ride to Rouen, France took a total of three-and-a-half hours.

Sitting comfortably at the rear of the plane, their conversation during that time was sparse. At one point David whispered in Paul's ear, "What are we doing anyway?"

Paul whispered back, "We have to go with what Juan says, within reason. We need his help, and remember that the secretary said it wouldn't take long. I'm sure he doesn't want the world to end either—otherwise why would he be willing to work with us? And the more he brings us into the overall deal, the better."

At another point, David asked Saltanban, "Your pilot up there—can he be trusted?"

"Yes, with our lives."

Paul had been to Rouen once before and remembered being told that it had prospered through maritime trade and industrialization to become a rich and cultured city despite severe damage during World War II.

This time around—and with the other two—he headed on foot to where the Seine could be bridged. Along the way they passed by many notable sights, including the Cathedral Notre-Dame, which harbored the tomb of Richard the Lionheart; the place where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake in the 15th century; and the family home of novelist Gustav Flaubert, who wrote *Madame Bovary.*

He walked with his head held high in contrast to David and Saltanban who evidently had trouble with their footing on cobblestones. Especially Saltanban, who was carrying a suitcase in one hand and his model's design plans in the other. Both Paul and David offered to carry one of them, but he refused.

It was about eleven a.m. on a sunny, cloudless Saturday. Occasional groups of swans drifted by in the waters ahead. The air smelled as fresh as the late summer lilacs in Paul and Sylvie's

Cape Cod backyard. The swans and fragrances seemed to beckon him to whistle a strolling tune. But he held off.

Paul soon spotted the *Aquatic Sonata* and informed the others that it was similar to the river boat he had sailed on before—long, narrow and blue in color. He could tell immediately that it had docked at one end of a lock area, for he could see a gate near the front of it and the remnants of a water line indicating the boat had settled down a few feet.

It didn't take them long to reach the gangway, which had several passengers steadying themselves as they held onto its side ropes to come ashore. They waited until it was clear and proceeded into the vestibule of the boat, then approached a young staff member who was handing out bottles of water to passengers about to leave.

Saltanban introduced himself and said he was there to consult with Louis Levesque.

With that, a uniformed man appeared and said, "Hi there. I'm Louis Levesque." He shook hands with Saltanban while saying, "You may not know it, but I recognize you from a picture I saw recently in the *Journal of Telecommunications*. Welcome aboard, Juan Carlos."

"Thank you," Juan said and introduced Paul and David as his associates. Further handshakes

followed as well as their complimentary comments about the boat's clean appearance.

Louis was tall and trim with dark straight hair that had been brushed straight back and then somehow slicked down. He had sideburns that cascaded to the level of his jaw and a patch over his right eye.

"I'm so grateful for your coming here and I apologize for any inconvenience," he said. "Please rest assured I won't keep you long."

"No problem," Saltanban said and handed him an envelope containing a list of his model's intended purposes. He next opened the box containing rolls of design plans—roughly twenty of them. He told Louis he could even keep the box so the committee chairman could examine the plans later.

"Would you like a cup of coffee or tea?" he asked. Paul said yes; the others declined.

"Good, I'll have a cup also," Louis said. "Let's go into the coffee and tea nook over to our left."

They went there, he tended to the coffees and all four sat and exchanged small talk for ten minutes or so.

Once the two coffee mugs were empty, he rose, saying, "Well now. Don't feel you have to put

up with me any longer, unless you'd like to stay for lunch. It will be served in about half an hour."

Saltanban glanced at the other two and, seeing blank expressions, said, "Thank you for the invitation, Louis, but we'd better be on our way."

Just off the gangplank, Saltanban was effusive in his expression of appreciation for Paul and David's coming along.

"Well, that was shorter than I thought it would be," he said.

David didn't respond and Paul seemed preoccupied with another thought. "Wait a minute," Paul said. "He didn't say when the committee will give its consent, if they do in the first place. I'm going back in."

Once inside, he found the vestibule empty and moseyed to a far side. For no good reason, his attention was drawn to a large window and a cement wall outside. The wall was about two feet from the side of the boat. He leaned forward, first to his left and then to his right. There, he beheld a sight that shook his innards like nothing had ever done before.

He saw a tall man's body attached to a ladder that was recessed and, in turn, attached to the wall. A piece of rope was wrapped tightly around his neck and the top rung of the ladder. His face was chalk-white and his arms had been swung

back at an acute angle behind him. There was no doubt he was dead and, on more focused examination, no doubt who he was. Larry Albino, the eavesdropper in Sylvie's office complex!

His reasoning was blurred but he finally decided not to tell the others waiting outside. Nor anyone on the boat. *Let them deal with it.* He would inform David when they were alone.

But before joining the others, he tossed around a myriad of questions: *Who told him we'd be here? Why was he here? Who did this to him? And why? Did he know too much? About what?*

He felt stymied but nonetheless decided to take Sylvie's oft-stated advice into consideration: "*Forge ahead with your drive and your spirit.*" He had to modify it though, at least somewhat: *As things now stand, what drive? What spirit?*

Outside, Paul said, "Louis looked too busy with some passengers, so I waited off to the side, but the more I waited, the more preoccupied he became. So I left."

"That is alright," Saltanban said. "He did say he would contact me and that is good enough. If I have not heard from him in a day or two, I will phone him."

Paul didn't want to press the issue. Instead, in view of what he had just seen, he just wanted to be alone with David.

Once the two separated from Saltanban—with mutual promises to keep in touch—Paul described in great detail what he had seen on the ladder.

David cringed and shook his head from side to side during the entire description. He finally said, "I wonder if something like that would've happened to *us* if we hung around."

"They'd probably try," Paul said.

"Larry Albino, eh? The spy? Why was he here in the first place? Do you think that intercom thing has been fixed back at Wood's Hole?"

"No, I checked with Sylvie yesterday. You were there when I called, remember? But I didn't give you the details. She said they're still waiting for an electrician to show up."

"You told her we were coming right here?"

"Yeah, I felt I had to. Never gave the spy a thought."

"So there you are! He was probably listening in and had plenty of time to fly here."

They decided to take a taxi rather than a bus to the Beauvais-Tille Airport and then pay for a flight back to the U.S. They would get reimbursed later by Oscar.

They were in the taxi less than a minute when an Asian-looking man rose from the

passenger side of the front seat. "Hands up, both of you!" he shouted, pointing a gun toward the back.

"You over there, lie down flat. And you, mister smart guy—that's what they tell me—here, cover your eyes with this ... this ... whatever it is ... this kerchief, and tie it in the back. We're going for a ride, but you don't have to see where. Understand?"

Paul did what he was told, while waiting for a chance to counter in some way.

"Tighter!" the man yelled, and again Paul followed along.

Soon the taxi slowed down and he heard the lament of what he guessed was a homeless beggar and the shrill cry of seagulls he'd heard on waterfronts before. Then there were sudden bangs and jolts as the taxi presumably hit potholes. From outside came the obvious barks and croaks of nearby seals.

Paul shook his head and breathed more shallowly when he detected a mixture of smells, acrid and foul, like that of an old dirty mop.

But he had an idea, a maneuver to try. He opened his eyes wide—then forced them shut, repeating the process over and over. Gradually the kerchief rose, perhaps a millimeter at a time. It took several minutes but finally a small slit appeared at its lower edge. He saw daylight! He didn't realize

it, but he'd lunged forward in composing himself. The seat shook.

"Hey, what's going on back there?" the man shouted, thrusting his gun directly at Paul.

Suddenly Paul found himself staring down the barrel of a handgun, not two feet away. With that, he unleashed a speedy and accurate karate chop to the man's wrist.

As the gun popped away and the man recoiled in pain, David straightened up and withdrew the Kahr pistol from his ankle rig. He pointed it at the head of the driver, another Asian-looking man.

"Stop this vehicle now! I mean it or else!" David exclaimed.

"Your Japanese pal here?" Paul said, almost over David's words. "His wrist's not broken, but you'd better have it tended to." He offered the advice without caring if he could be heard.

The taxi screeched to a stop as Paul added, "Let's scram and not get embroiled in this with the Rouen police."

They beat it down a side street and before long another cab came by. They entered it after first giving its driver the once over and judging that the taxi ride would be a safe one.

As they settled back in their seats, they shook hands and congratulated each other. "What

is it with these taxis?" Paul asked. "First in Buenos Aires and now in France."

"I guess we'll just have to assume we're being watched … or tailed … wherever we are."

"Maybe not so much now that Albino is gone," Paul said.

"We'll see."

Paul, thinking it appropriate, asked, "You still want to associate with me on this damn mission I'm on?"

David didn't hesitate. "All the way," he said.

"But what about your own responsibilities?"

"I can put them on hold."

Paul registered genuine concern. "Now wait a minute," he said, "I can't go along with that. Look, tell you what—you check on it. If what's developed since you joined me … if it's minor and can be postponed—fine and dandy. But if it's important, so be it."

David remained silent, biting his lower lip, then gently stroking his chin. Finally he said, "Okay, let's work it like that. I'll call you right after I check."

After a significant lull during which they gazed out the window, each with blank expressions, Paul broke the silence.

"So many questions, David—so many. I just hope it was only Albino and not Saltanban, too … I mean tipping people off about our being here."

"But why would he?" David asked. "Why take the time to show us his model? Why give us the pistols?"

"To throw us off guard. About the model? To get us to come here in the first place. He told us he'd demonstrate it to us but he didn't, really, when you think about it."

"But why go through all that anyway?" David asked.

"Beats me. I'll just be glad to get home and to …"

"And to what?"

"I was about to say, 'mind our own business', but with Sarin Day coming up, that's not possible."

They had disposed of their guns and knives in a trash barrel before boarding the plane in Rouen. Paul did the actual disposing while David served as lookout.

Paul also called ahead for limos from JFK Airport to Hollings, Connecticut for David and to Falmouth, Massachusetts for himself.

No sooner had Paul arrived home, given Sylvie a prolonged hug and begun his explanation

of everything that had transpired during the trip, than the phone rang. It was about eight p.m., U.S. time and it was Saltanban calling.

"Am I disturbing you?" he asked.

Paul checked his watch and felt he'd be hearing something dreadful. "Not at all," he said, momentarily holding his breath. "But Juan, isn't it early morning there, like around two?"

"It is exactly two-thirty and I am often up this late, working on my model. But I am not sure any more."

Paul wasn't at all certain what to say and decided on a question. "You mean about working late or working on the model?"

"Both," Juan replied.

Paul had never before detected so much dejection in a single word.

"Some hours ago, I received a call from Louis Levesque, but I did not want to phone you then. It was because I did not believe I could really make sense and because I did not think you had arrived home yet."

"Oh?"

"Yes. He said they have rejected my model indefinitely. I asked him why and the son-of-a-bitch said it was ... dangerous ... for all mankind. That somebody might steal it and do bad things." His voice rang of stark bitterness.

Paul's reaction was two-fold. He thought of the potential consequences regarding Sarin Day plus the effort Saltanban had put into his project. But he alluded to neither, instead stating, "I'm truly sorry, Juan. Would it help if I contacted him to vouch for your ability to preserve ... to ... to ... keep things safe ... and so forth? You know what I mean."

"Yes, I do know. But do not bother. Let me think on this unexpected development. I must go now. Thank you for listening and I am sorry I cannot help you as I thought I could. Sarin Day? Good luck, my friend. The whole world would be depending on *you* if the whole world knew."

Paul felt devastated and showed it. Sylvie hurried to his side and he relayed what he'd just heard. "That settles it," he said. "I don't think Saltanban's involved in any kind of plot, but there's an outside chance that Levesque is. Tomi? Doubtful. Asahara? No doubt. Both the barber and the spy—Rocco Stratta and Larry Albino—were, but not any more. They're too dead! And Oscar wouldn't make any sense. But who else in the cast of characters I've come across? Marlene? Nah. Velda? Nah.

"So it seems like we'll have to go it alone. Looks like the whole Gibraltar and Rouen trips were a waste of time. And nearly got us killed. But

I guess we learned some things—like Albino's role, or non-role as it turned out."

Sylvie fixed him an instant tea and herself a decaf coffee.

"And you know, Syl," he said, frowning. "I think that whole Levesque committee was bogus. Only it probably didn't cross Juan's mind. I can't believe now that there's any such committee that would have any say in how he uses his invention. But if he feels he has to share with a committee—if one exists in the first place—the fact that it's to be used rather soon in warding off Sarin Day, I don't see why not. Before you tell me, I do know I'm changing my mind in mid-sentence but what I'm trying to say is it's a chance he'd have to take. *We'd* have to take. It's that important.

"So I'll wait till the morning … after I get some shuteye. Then I'll call him back and tell him that there's no doubt in my mind that the so-called committee is a fraud. A make-believe, pure and simple. I know it's only eight here, but I'm bushed, and besides, it's still two or three in the morning over there."

"I can tell you're bushed from the way you're talking," she said, "so go to bed and I'll be there soon. And darling, I don't know if it would be valuable or not, but I just thought of something. One of the top men at the ICFA has asked for the

Marine Lab's help many, many times. His name is Jack Jackson. He even visited us once at the Lab. Nice gentleman. We've done quite a bit of research for him and his organization. A favor here, a favor there over the years. And I wonder if it'd be useful to contact him about whether or not Juan could use his invention. Or would he be breaking some kind of law? I'm sure he'd act quickly, as I always have.

"Just this last time—last week in fact—I researched something for him and he said it's about time he reciprocated. That's the way he put it. He even gave me his home phone number. I have it and his office number in the desk drawer."

Paul perked up. "What's the ICFA?" he asked.

"The International Council on Foreign Affairs."

"Hmm, definitely sounds productive."

He then gave her a brief rundown on satelnetics before indicating he'd phone Juan in the morning.

About twelve hours later, Paul called Gibraltar but was greeted with a busy signal. He proceeded to call every four hours and got the same result. Finally the connection was made late that night.

"Juan," he said, "sorry it's so late again. I've been trying to reach you all day. You're awake?"

"Yes, I will retire soon, and feel free to call me any time. As for earlier, I had to tend to some other business I had let go—things that my workers here were getting anxious about. So I took the phone off the hook. But Paul! I cannot believe it! I planned on calling *you* today or tomorrow. What is up?"

To Paul, he seemed more animated than during their last conversation.

"No, you go first, Juan."

"No ... well, if you insist. I wanted to ask you a question. Do you think that Levesque person is what he claims to be?"

Paul was astounded over the coincidence. Saltanban, on his own, had come to the same conclusion as he and Sylvie had!

"I take it you're saying he isn't." This time, Paul sounded animated. "Unbelievable," he said, "because it's the same as *my* thinking. It's the reason I'm calling."

"Then we are in agreement. It has to be so. Where do we go from here?"

"Well, I have a suggestion. Actually it's one both Sylvie and I came up with. She's become very friendly—business friendly— with a key person at a New York organization called the International Council on Foreign Affairs. And we both believe

he'd know, right off the bat, if you'd be breaking any law by using your model."

There was silence at the other end, allowing Paul to elaborate. "We're both convinced you wouldn't, but if we have their backing, it makes it even more ... more what? More positive, more definite. I mean, you wouldn't be committing a crime. Unfortunately though, her question would carry more weight if she brought up the whole Sarin Day preparation. But I have to go by what she says. That he's a trustworthy guy and wouldn't blab it all around. That he'd keep his mouth shut."

The silence continued until Paul asked, "Your reaction?"

"I do not know what to say except that I am very, very encouraged. It is worth a try. Yes, go ahead, by all means."

"Good, good. It's late so we'll call him first thing in the morning. I'll call you back with what he says. Bye for now."

At nine in the morning, Sylvie went to the desk drawer and withdrew a card with Jackson's name and phone numbers on it. Fingers crossed, she placed the call.

It didn't last long but as expected, she received the reply they were after.

Following a loud thank-you, and a smug deposit of the phone back onto the receiver, she

said to Paul, "Here's what he said, word for word. 'I don't even have to check with any of my colleagues. I'm sure he wouldn't be committing a sin'. That's the way he framed his response. Isn't it marvelous?"

Paul, in turn, called Saltanban back. "So soon?" he asked.

"Yep. And you can go ahead with our plans. You needn't check with anybody any further."

"Thank you, thank you, my friend," Juan said. "I shall finish the little that needs to be done with my model and await your getting back to me."

"You'll be the first to hear when anything breaks, Juan."

For at least a few days anyway, Paul believed the Saltanban-Sarin Day issue could be held in abeyance, allowing him to turn his attention to pirates, prostitution and Perónism—the three P's. Plus other things.

An energized Sylvie left for work while Paul alternated between stretching exercises and pacing while munching on a cracker. It didn't take long for her to phone him.

"I just got a call from a certain Frederick Dole from the Daringwell Cruise Line," she said. "It's the leader of many other ships that wish to remain anonymous. He's the president of his line

and wants to meet with me. And you, too. He's willing to come here to talk about piracy. I'm not sure because the connection was weak, but I think he used a swear word."

"I don't blame him, but when?"

"Today. This afternoon. He says he could be here by three."

Paul wondered why *he* was included and, more specifically, whether or not Mr. Dole knew of his interest in the piracy issue. And, if he did, how did he find out?

"Fine. I'll be there. I'm resurrecting that along with the other two, and this might be a good way to start. And while I'm at it, I've been debating about adding the Sarin Day-Saltanban package. That's what I'll call it: 'the package'. Even though Oscar didn't include it in his challenges—he didn't know about it actually—it's come along and I believe is the most important of all. So now we have another P to make it four: piracy, prostitution, Perónism, and the package."

Paul resumed his pacing and thinking. *It's clear that Asahara and his people are after me, but what about the Mob if I continue in this pursuit? They stand to lose millions if their link to pirates is cut off and they learn that I'm the cause of it. As for prostitution, I couldn't be expected to eliminate all of it for an eternity, just when it came to Marlene*

and Velda. So prostitution will continue to exist and so will piracy to some extent.

At precisely three p.m., Dole was ushered into Sylvie's office and didn't take time to shake hands with her or with Paul, who was immediately disinclined to care for the man and shoved a chair into his backside. Dole plunked into it.

He appeared to be in his sixties and had a ruddy face, a pronounced shoulder stoop and bags under his eyes. His white hair was more blown than one would expect on such a windless day and he spoke like a racetrack announcer during the homestretch.

"I won't take up much of your time. Or mine, come to think of it. But about the increasing problem of piracy. You're aware of Somalia, I'm sure. But there's also the Caribbean and right here off Cape Cod. And the various bays near Eastern Europe and Japan. Not to mention around the Philippines and near Hawaii. Just about anywhere. Are you aware? If not, you should be, because …"

Paul jumped in. "Now wait a minute, sir. Let's be more civil, shall we?"

Dole had hit a nerve and Paul reacted. He was *livid* and outstared the man.

A slouching Dole tried to straighten up but his shoulders wouldn't let him. "I'm sorry," he said.

"I do apologize." The cadence of his words had slowed down. "It's just that we in the industry don't know what to do all the time. We have the responsibility for the safety of all our passengers. And our reputations. Do we just fire at every small vessel that comes near us, or what? If we think negotiation, will they surprise us and take hostages? It's a puzzle and a big one."

"I'll get to that in a minute," Paul said, "but first, how did you find out about my interest in piracy?"

"I appealed to the *Emerald Research* organization and an Oscar Blackstone there told me about hiring you to look into the piracy business. Is that the case?"

"That's the case alright."

"Well, we'll cooperate in any way we can and especially in anything you see fit. But on one condition."

"Oh? What's that?"

"That you not mention our cruise line's name to anyone. As a matter of fact, I can't speak one-hundred percent for them, but I would assume the other lines feel the same way."

"I have no need to, but how come?"

"I understand the industry feels that if we go overboard in protecting ourselves vis-a-vis all

pirates, they might redouble their activity. Plus the activity of another group of villains."

Paul thought the phrase "if we go overboard" almost deserved a laugh. *Leave it to the president of a cruise line to choose that wording!*

"Who's the other group?" he asked.

"The Mob."

Paul knew the answer but figured he'd play dumb and draw him out—to learn how much Dole knew.

"Now wait," he began, "you mean to tell me that organized crime has a vested interest in piracy?"

"Absolutely. The bottom line is that I'm here for some guidance in how we should behave. Shoot to kill, or agree to negotiate?"

Somehow Paul believed Dole himself was playing dumb.

"I see. It hasn't been long since I was hired for this and for other things too, so I can't give you specifics," Paul said thoughtfully.

"Yet," Sylvie said.

"Yet," Paul added. "But I have a generality or two. First and foremost is that I don't think you should shoot willy-nilly at any suspicious small vessel. And the reason is that not all so-called pirate ships have true pirates aboard, determined to demand ransom money after kidnapping people off

cruise liners. Some of these small vessels contain ordinary fishermen, just trying to make a living. Not a substantial number, but some of them anyway. And it may be hard to tell at first glance."

Paul rubbed his decision scar before continuing. "Secondly, piracy is only one of several things I'm being paid to investigate. I won't bore you with all of them but I'll mention another. Prostitution."

Dole's eyes widened as he leaned closer to Paul.

"Yes, prostitution. This may be tied in with diamonds that may be used ..."

"Wait. I should really chip in here," Sylvie said. "Let me!" She looked over at Paul for approval and, receiving none, still went ahead. "Modern pirates are almost definitely in cahoots with organized crime gangs that help plunder ... I don't think that's too strong a word ... that help plunder cargo and cruise ships. Even private yachts. And a portion of the diamonds obtained in some prostitution activity may be used—through the Mob—to pay off the pirates. Notice that I said 'a portion'. The Mob keeps the rest. So they all make money—the prostitutes, the pirates and organized crime figures. There, that's off my chest."

Dole appeared bedeviled. "So I have to give you more time," he said.

"Yes, we'd appreciate it," Paul said. "But don't worry, we'll get back to you. One way or another."

They walked as a unit to the door. Dole extended his hand to stop them, turned and said, "Here's what I was too preoccupied to do a few minutes ago."

He shook their hands with gusto while saying, "Thank you for receiving me and good luck in what you're trying to do. It's quite an undertaking and I don't envy you."

They exchanged smartphone numbers and gave each other a thumb's up sign as Dole left.

Paul knew better than anyone else that he had additional work cut out for him. He entertained a qualifier, however, one he'd reviewed over and over again. That the "package" and the cruise lines' concerns could be put on temporary hold.

Later, as he roamed the grounds of his home, he paid little attention to the various plantings until he got to the sea holly. He watched the stabbing maneuvers of a bumblebee directly atop one of the blossoms and of a butterfly lofting here and there. The more he watched, the more he

thought he was "losing it", for it led him to believe they each had a plan of action, while he did not.

Brainless innocent creatures with a plan of action?

He felt *he* had to construct one, however, and returned to his study where he grasped a writing pad—almost with a vengeance, his mind drifting back to Oscar's original charge—and scribbled down what he felt was a working draft. He would deal with challenges in the following order:

Challenge 1
Locate Evita's jewelry box

Challenge 2
Weaken
"international ring of terror"—
prostitution, piracy and Perónism.

Challenge 3
Double the alert for more
Asian hood encounters

Challenge 4
Asahara, Levesque and Tomi

Challenge 5

Cruise line worries

Challenge 6

"Package" of Sarin Day and Saltanban

Paul was tempted to move the sixth challenge to the number one spot, but the "package" was days, possibly weeks away. *Hopefully the others will have been disposed of or at least addressed properly by then. Furthermore, if dealt with sooner, the others will be anti-climactic.*

He read over what he'd written and realized that one or two of the challenges had already been handled. But with mixed results. He would return to them in a timely way and do his best to "unmix the mixed".

He reminded himself that located within the draft were the end results he was aiming for. That once achieved, he and Sylvie could go on a vacation without telling anyone!

"So let's get on with it," he muttered. Reflexly, he looked over his shoulder to see if anyone was listening.

Chapter 15

The phone rang and it was David. "You know," he said, "you were right. I *do* have a case that can't wait. Sorry about that, but if I can handle it before you're finished with yours, I'd be glad to rejoin you."

"See? I thought so, Paul said. "And as far as my finishing here, I simply can't imagine an end to it."

"C'mon now. I've seen you in tough situations and you've performed brilliantly. What about the haunted woman case? Or the gingerbread fiasco? Or 'Becky and the Silver Stars' up in Manitoba? I could go on and on."

"Those were single issues, though. This has multiple strings that have to be tied together. It's really a nightmare."

"I have every confidence in you, Paul. And don't worry, you'll succeed."

"Thanks, David. I'll keep you posted. And you do the same."

Lately, Paul had hung up the phone in a manner reflecting how he felt. Gently meant satisfied. Heavily meant disgust or anger. This time it was gently.

For it was all he needed. Encouragement from a best friend. A friend who would level with him, even pointing out negatives. Weaknesses. A performance that was falling short. He'd received none of that. And he gloated over the word "brilliantly".

He perused his working draft and decided not to skip around. Evita and the jewelry box headed the list so he phoned Joe Gomez in Buenos Aires.

"Anything new?" he asked.

"Nothing at this end. I should have notified you, but I went through the other cartons and found no diamonds."

"Then I think we'll just have to go with the single diamond and the cobweb theory of mine. Which doesn't eliminate the Marlene possibility.

Besides, remember what she said when we met with her and Velda? That she hands boxes of diamonds over to three other parties?"

"The bitch wouldn't say who they are. Maybe we should have pressed her on it."

"I really don't think it would've done any good. But we'll get to the bottom of this … you'll see. If anything along this line develops up here, I'll give you a buzz. And thanks a million, Joe."

Paul hung up the phone halfway between gently and heavily for he was hoping for more telling news from down south, but he wasn't disgusted or angry.

So that's that regarding challenge #1. Maybe there'll be something more definite as we move along. I can't help but think that going through my draft and probing, probing, probing into the affairs of others will be productive … because there's a common thread here. Eventually we'll find it. They're all related in some way or another. Everybody will see.

For some reason, Paul seemed to have been transformed from an impatient and dejected soul to a more laid back and confident investigator. However, he had never had so many internal monologues. Up till now, some had left him reeling—in Buenos Aires, in Gibraltar, in Italy, in Japan, in France—but this current one was

different. It left positive results rather than a mind that was as uncertain as the path of a tornado in Kansas.

He'd even negated his "no travel resolution" in favor of "travel anywhere" if deemed necessary. He half realized the unusual turnaround, but he wasn't about to quibble about it.

And he didn't try to analyze why the change, instead moving on to the next challenge: "Weaken international ring of terror—prostitution, piracy and Perónism." He had designated it #2 only because it had no life and death implications for all mankind—as #6 had. The #6 that should be #1, he pointed out under his breath.

He'd used the word "Weaken" advisedly for he was well aware that prostitution and piracy could never be totally eliminated. Nor Perónism, for that matter. Better known as Evitaism. Adoration of Eva Perón, irrespective of any lovemaking, would continue to survive.

In somehow threatening the three, however, he foresaw a situation that would be both startling and constructive. Exuding from such an approach could be news of a person he hadn't even thought of. Or possibly even met. One who might tie it all together and voilá—problems solved!

But how to threaten? That's the sticking point.

How to begin?
Whom to call first?
Or should it be a visit? Or more.

He couldn't believe he was lowering the floodgates of travel.

He considered the ring of terror one at a time. Prostitution? That meant Marlene and another trip to Buenos Aires.

Piracy? He elected Frederick Dolc. He had no doubt played dumb. Maybe visit a cruise liner?

Perónism? On the same visit to Argentina.

"Hello. Marlene?"

"In person. You want I should come there or you come here? Coming there means more diamonds, you know."

Paul made as if it hadn't registered. "This is Paul," he said.

"No … I thought it was the Count of Monte Carlo."

"Very funny, Marlene. But it's the Count of *Monte Cristo*. And it's not anyway. It's Paul D'Arneau calling."

"I'm sorry. I knew it, but I had a couple of wines."

"Good for you. Should I call another time?" Paul thought it was the proper thing to ask even

though, under the circumstances, Marlene might be more open-minded right now. More cooperative.

"Listen, my dear," he said. "I've got to talk to you about diamonds. I'd be glad to fly there. Matter of fact, I can kill two birds with one stone. I must look into some Perón particulars."

"Anything about Eva is alright with me. Yes, when could you come down?"

"How about tomorrow—Tuesday? Say about mid-afternoon?"

"I'll be waiting."

"Where can we meet?"

"The Pink House? The big room to the left. Where I feel at home."

Paul agreed to the location and also realized she'd been there often in the past, bolstering his theory that she'd stored diamonds there at one time. He further decided he didn't want to be found caught with her.

On one occasion, he was found alone with a beautiful movie starlet in Hollywood. She had hired him to locate a man who had disappeared from her life. A man who was worth millions, primarily in gold and silver coins. Paul had located the coins in the ruins of a home that had burned to the ground, evidently the work of an arsonist.

But he never located the man and paid for it because the starlet refused to compensate him, stating his assistance was incomplete.

Paul could have taken legal action but decided not to, for many of his discussions with her took place in her apartment. Just the two of them. He didn't need Sylvie to remind him that a legal suit might boomerang depending on her description of their discussions.

This time, therefore, he would once more ask for Chief Gomez's help.

"Joe, it's me again. As soon as I got home, I started to work on some things, and our friend Marlene and the diamonds came up. I phoned her and we're to meet tomorrow afternoon at the Pink House. Wouldn't be caught dead with her there. I mean alone. Could you come, too?"

"Absolutely, my friend. Could you clue me in first?"

"Well, there's that triple challenge of prostitution, piracy and Perónism I told you about. Plus, God help us, some other things. Anyway, I've got to limit my energies to them one at a time, but I figure in this case I can combine prostitution and Perónism since Marlene's the key figure in both."

"I see, but by the way, aren't you sick of traveling so much?"

"Yeah, anyone would be. But no, it needs to be done. For the community college program if nothing else." Paul immediately bit his tongue.

"The what?"

"Never mind. It's a long story."

The next call was to Dolores Sousa, his histarian friend who was keeping tabs on Marlene. He learned that she, Marlene, had not complied with any of the promulgated intentions that applied to mimicking Evita. He was happy with himself for checking on this before arriving in Buenos Aires.

Paul contacted the Joint Base Cape Cod air group, outlining his Argentine itinerary and guaranteeing it wouldn't take long. So he would need a flight back soon after arrival there.

"I guess it would be seven, two, and seven," he said. "Seven hours down, two there and seven back. Sixteen hours. But only a one-hour difference in time zones. No jet lag to speak of."

He and the Chief entered The Pink House and strolled to the left corner room. Its door was wide open. Inside, a smiling Marlene stood in the center, her hands in the side pockets of a high-waisted skirt.

Paul recalled reading somewhere that most designers felt there was something chic about a woman with hands in her pockets.

The skirt's design—a variegated display of birds and flowers on a black background—matched that of her blouse, and the pockets seemed to add to the easy, slouchy air of both.

"Welcome," she said. "If I had a cocktail shaker, I'd offer you a drink."

"Actually, I need one right about now," Paul retorted. "I've gotten to hate airplanes. But hi, Marlene. Thanks for coming. You know Chief Gomez here."

"Yes, of course." She gave them a limp handshake, they pulled over chairs and they sat down.

"Where do you want to start?" she asked. Paul interpreted the unexpected question as a sign of her being anxious to cooperate. But he'd jumped to conclusions before.

"Okay. For starters, let's get right to it," Paul responded. "A jewelry box belonging to Evita. Is there such a thing and if so, was it stolen?"

"A jewelry box? I'm not aware of one. Maybe once upon a time, but I doubt it. I guess you'd call it a mystery. So how could a mystery be stolen?"

Strange answer! No doubt holding back, but who's to say for sure?

"Okay, next. Those two parties you mentioned once before? The ones you gave diamonds to?"

"Yes, what about them? That was a blunder on my part. I mean even mentioning them. And incidentally, it was three parties, not two."

"Okay, three parties then, but the blunder was giving them diamonds?"

"No, bringing them up in the first place."

"You mean the three parties, not the diamonds. Right?"

"Right."

Gomez butted in as though it were expected of him.

"I thought so," he said, "but since you did, how about this for a bargain? You tell us who they are and I'll pave the way for your being the second coming of Evita."

Paul was shocked that Gomez was taking such an interest. Plus "the second coming of Evita" sounded so poetic to him.

"Uh-uh," Marlene responded. "I was sworn to secrecy and besides …"

She started to strip.

"No, no!" Paul exclaimed. "Not here."

"Where then?" Marlene asked. "She put one arm back in her blouse. "Only kidding, gentlemen. But I want to show you something."

She held her other arm up to the light, revealing two parallel bruises.

"See? That's where one of them grabbed me and said I'd better cooperate or else."

Paul was about to convey his sorrow, but then thought the bruising could have occurred when she accidentally bumped into a door or something.

He faced the possibility head-on.

"Funny," he said, "I once had the same kind of bruising when I slammed into a door."

"You doubt me?"

"Sorry. Just trying to be thorough."

There was stone silence until he changed the subject. "Now Velda?" he said.

"What about her?"

"What's she up to? Where is she now, for example?"

Marlene concentrated for a long time before replying. "She's next door, off the coast of Montevideo—in the Rio de la Plata."

"What's she doing there?"

"Tending to business with two pirates. In their vessel."

"How'd she get there?"

"By motorboat. It happens a lot."

"In the middle of the waters?"

"No, in nearby harbors."

"She'd navigate herself?"

"No, the Mob would take her."

"So it's harbor whoring, eh?"

Gomez snickered.

Marlene flashed a disgusted look and said, "I suppose so."

"Let me get this straight," Paul said. "She's taking care of two pirates?"

"Yes. They had a date."

"But after they … they … use her, wouldn't they dump her overboard?"

"No way. They'd hope for a future date with her. She might go back, but she'll probably leave the area and return sometime later. The pirates won't leave though. They almost patrol the waters there."

"Patrol them? Where'd you get that?"

"That's what Velda says."

"And if she were to go back, why so?"

"More diamonds."

"Who supplies them?"

"Who else? The Mob." Marlene seemed to enjoy the rapid-fire exchange and was evidently prepared to spill a few beans.

Meanwhile, Paul had garnered the solution to his second challenge: the relationship among diamonds, prostitution and pirates. And probably

the answer to the first: Evita's jewelry box. Its alleged theft, its alleged existence in the first place.

But he wanted to clarify a few things. "Wait a minute," he said. "Where would she get the motorboat?"

"The Mob again."

"And why would the Mob supply the pirates with diamonds in the first place?"

"Don't worry—mobsters aren't dummies. The pirates would eventually repay them with ransom money they got from cruise ships. Assuming each diamond is worth about five-hundred-dollars, the pirates would pay them more than that because the mobsters would have to make a profit. Remember, they gave up five-hundred-dollar diamonds in the first place."

Paul was touching one finger at a time to help understand it all. He didn't entirely, but he got the gist of it and decided it was best to change course.

"And what's the status of your visiting around the city, if you don't mind my asking?"

Let's see how she handles this.

"It's going very well. Good responses. I'm building up valuable connections with the elite down here."

Paul interpreted that with skepticism. "How?" he asked.

"Oh, helping people get elected or appointed to public office. Just like Evita did."

Liar! That's not what Dolores said.

Paul was tired of her responses, honest or not. After an invitation to dinner was turned down, he scratched an imaginary itch on his forehead while giving an eye signal to Gomez. The Chief's nod was almost imperceptible.

"Well then," Paul said, rising. "My plane is awaiting, so we'll be off. You've been most helpful, Marlene. You have my number and I have yours, so let's not hesitate to call whenever—or for whatever."

On the way out, they let her go first, while they lagged behind some.

Paul said, "All things considered, we got what we were after: one, the probable nonexistence of a jewelry box; and two, a definite relationship regarding prostitution, piracy and Perónism."

"If Oscar isn't satisfied, then I give up."

Chapter 16

It was slightly after 1 a.m., Wednesday, when he arrived home. Sylvie was asleep and he didn't waken her.

He had napped on and off during the return flight and looked forward to checking something on the computer, no matter the time, for he was bothered by something involving the Rio de la Plata.

He downloaded what appeared to be the most concise article about the place and read it word-for word:

> The Rio de la Plata separates Uruguay and Argentina on the southeastern coast of South America. It is the widest estuary in

the world. Its mouth is one-hundred-twenty miles wide. At the head of the estuary, the width is about twenty miles.

It originates at the junction of the Uruguay and Panama rivers. The estuary is about one-hundred-seventy miles long and empties into the Atlantic Ocean. The watershed begins in central Brazil. The Rio de la Plata collects waters from rivers that flow in the highlands of Brazil, Northern Argentina, the south of Brazil and Paraguay.

The Rio de la Plata is very important economically to the countries that are within the basin. Harvests from the estuary are the most important resource. The estuary is the main fishing ground for the region. Hydroelectric plants that are found within the estuarine region provide energy to the area.

The rivers that flow into the estuary are the main water resource for the most densely populated regions of South America.

Every day, a band of pirates can be seen trolling around in the estuary—where legitimate fishermen also troll and where

the area's main energy source is located, completely unprotected.

Reading about it, however, did little to satisfy his curiosity or relieve his discomfort. In fact, the whole Velda/Rio de la Plata setup reminded him of a time when he had to travel to Socotra, an island off the coast of Yemen and the Gulf of Aden. He was on assignment there and soon after arrival, was accosted by four Japanese men, an incident that nearly led to his drowning.

It was a time when such an escapade eventually became part of a book about Paul, one that was later made into a movie. He located the book in a cluttered bookcase and read some of its key sentences:

– They led him to an alley that was dark, dank and smelled of old garbage.

– He felt his face blotch and his finger itch.

– He was afraid his judo moves would be useless against four men.

– They tied his wrists behind him and applied duct tape over his mouth.

– He felt as though all the air had been sucked out of his lungs.

– They lifted him up over a metal railing and tossed him into a restless sea.

– He flipped onto his back and kicked hard to stay afloat.

– Upon spotting a wooden ladder, he wrapped his body around it.

– He then used his chin and knees to elevate himself over the railing.

– He used a split in the railing to free his hands.

– Then he ripped the tape from his mouth and shuffled back to the hotel

– There, he was about to …

Paul planned on reading more but he'd had enough, for he began to feel queasy. But it proved to be another instance of matter over an agitated mind. He asked both his mind and stomach to calm down.

After a moment or two, he realized he hadn't gained much in reading either about the Rio de la Plata or about his attack on Socotra Island. He would dismiss them as best he could.

Later that morning, it dawned on him that he should check in with Oscar. Their last conversation had been over a week before. Once again, he referred to his notepad during their conversation

and covered many of the details of what he'd previously written:

> Takeda Pharmaceutical's Tomi Hoshi and I met with Asahara, a top quality jerk.
>
> Tomi's legit, I think, but Asahara's determined to end the world.
>
> Arranged for Dolores Sousa to keep tabs on Marlene.
>
> David Brooks, Juan Carlos Saltanban, a possible role of the New Kamakazis in the expected Sarin Day attack …

All of a sudden, he slammed the notepad shut after realizing he hadn't shared the Sarin Day counterattack with Oscar. Nothing about it. Thus, he asked Oscar to call him back using the new cryptic line. Paul had to give him its special phone number but was unconcerned about the number's being intercepted, for even if that occurred, he would speak only with someone he recognized.

Oscar followed through and Paul then spent forty minutes over the cryptic line, elaborating on the subject and ending with, "It's not part of my charge, but unfortunately it has to be one of my top priorities."

Oscar's reaction was two-fold: first of all, it was as if he'd been struck by a thunderbolt; and

second, he agreed totally with Paul's declaration that Sarin Day deserved top priority. Even, on certain days, the *only* priority.

"As president of *Emerald Research*," he said, "I'll gladly increase your overall stipend for this additional responsibility. I know it comes at a bad time, but that shouldn't be your worry. For heaven's sake, you didn't ask for it. Your worry should be in preventing it from happening."

"No, Oscar. No need for an increase. You didn't ask for it either, so it's a tie."

Chapter 17

It was about time for Paul to begin wrapping things up. At least that was what he thought, though it sounded too easy.

He had not only grown tired of loose end after loose end, and even of some of the characters involved in this cliffhanger. He also sensed his life was still on the line. But once he was off the case, he imagined the threats would cease. It had followed that course before.

His first order of business was to resolve the issues brought up by Frederick Dole of the Daringwell Cruise Line. He reached its president with no difficulty—smartphone to smartphone. Dole happened to be aboard the *Golden Classic*, the line's signature ship. It was temporarily docked

in Boston and Paul indicated he'd be willing to speak with him there. Dole thanked him and said he'd be waiting impatiently.

Paul could have just as easily discussed things by phone. But after having given it much thought, he concluded that what he had in mind would have far-reaching implications within the entire cruise industry. For this reason, he wanted to observe Dole's reaction close-up. Besides, Boston was little more than an hour's drive away.

Prior to the drive, he downloaded some material about Dole and learned that he had previously worked for ten years as a C.I.A. operative assigned as consultant to an international cargo ship company.

His specialty was in fleet and ship management, marine engineering, operations and contracting. As such, he developed a network of allies. And enemies, too. For he demanded that all his recommendations be strictly followed.

He also became a stickler over formality and compliance with written rules, some of which he'd written himself. Like the necessity for commanders of cargo ships to wear shirts or jackets having special company insignias. Now and then, he laughingly characterized his approach as "running a tight ship".

Eventually he left the C.I.A. on friendly terms and, rising in stature, could have accepted the lead position of nearly any cruise line; he chose Daringwell. As of January, 2015, he was still its president.

Paul arrived at the Port of Boston at about eleven-forty-five a.m. and boarded the three-thousand-passenger, eleven-deck *Golden Classic*. Dole was waiting for him in the main lobby and offered to escort him around key parts of the ship before they retired to a cabin to talk.

After initial warm greetings, he asked: "Why do I deserve your coming here?"

Time for fibbing.

"I had business on the other side of Boston, anyway. So you know: two birds with one stone."

Paul had encountered many of the ship's features aboard the ships he'd lectured on, but not nearly the amount of gold. It was everywhere! On the walls, ceilings and fountain sides; on the stairway balustrades and in decorative cutouts in nearly every bar; on the railing of the two-story library; and even lining the diving boards of its three swimming pools.

At one point, they stopped to have coffee, tea and a glazed doughnut apiece.

The cabin suite was massive and unoccupied. Dole sat on a chair, an elaborate

dressing table at his back. Paul gave the suite a quick once over and elected to sit on the side of its king-size bed. From there he had an excellent view of the back of Dole's shoulder in the full-length mirror.

Paul had a "thing" about shoulders and often confided about it with Sylvie. She would minimize it as much as he would maximize it. He claimed he could measure one's sincerity simply by noticing the movement of a person's shoulder and its adjacent structures—the clavicle in front and the shoulder blade to the rear. Even if the person's face remained stoic. He would tag on the importance of sincerity with the deduction that if sincerity were not present, "what's the sense in believing anything that was said?"

Sylvie once posed the question to him: "What if there *isn't* any movement?"

His answer? "There may never be hand or facial movement, but there's always shoulder movement. I can't describe what certain movements mean exactly but you can bet I know."

They were in bed at the time, and hearing that, she pulled the covers over her neck and turned to the other side.

Once with Dole, Paul decided to plunge right into what he had in store for him: a prepared

series of statements and recommendations. He reached into his satchel and fumbled around in it. He knew exactly where his notepad was, but this gave him time to think about other possible recommendations.

"Ah, here it is," he declared. "First off, Frederick ... I may call you that?"

"No, make it Fred ... Paul."

"Fred then. I must begin by telling you about probably the most important thing to help in the cruise industry's problem. Knowing about it, if you don't already ... well it's something you can share with your colleagues at other cruise lines. I assume you're all friends. I mean professional friends."

Dole appeared noncommittal as Paul observed a twitch in his shoulder. He then flipped through his notepad and said, "Here we are. I didn't tell you about Marlene the Diamond Queen, did I?" He knew he hadn't.

"No, who's she?"

Paul gave a concise but complete description of Marlene and her sexual activities. Plus her relevance to cruise ships.

"But of more importance is a lady named Velda Conklin. She and Marlene often work together, but in the context of cruise ships, Velda's

the significant one, as you'll soon hear—in fact, right now."

He consulted his notes. "Velda's what … or rather *who* I was referring to when I mentioned 'the most important thing' a minute ago. Here's what I took down when Marlene was talking to me about her.

"Let's see here—I'll fill in the blanks as I go along. She said, 'I supply the diamonds that serve as bait for certain pirates'. She, of course, gets the diamonds in her prostitution work. Anyway, she then said that's where Velda comes in. She is loaned to pirate boats that sneak up on bigger ships, including those as big as yours. Then she and the pirates climb aboard from the rear, looking for members of a ship's crew but undetected by its captain. She's in effect promised to the leader of the crew or an alternate—I understand they have fistfights over it. Ransom money is paid, it's handed over to the Mob and they and the pirates somehow split it up."

Paul then admitted he had played dumb during their last encounter when he, Dole, had mentioned the Mob as being evident in pirate-cruise ship interaction.

Dole said, "I'll be darned. You drew me out, and that woman drives out the ships."

"Not quite related though, Fred. I drew you out for a purpose. At the time, I had no idea about how much you knew. And the Velda/pirate scheme has nothing to do with it."

Paul saw little significance in Dole's shoulder movements and waited for him to say something. And he was changing his opinion of him. To favorable.

"So Paul, it's obvious we have to counter such activity," Dole said emphatically. "I just don't understand why I haven't heard about this before."

"Because, I'm sure, no crew member wants to squeal. Remember, men who fight over something like sex—actually risking their lives over it—are capable of beating down one of their own if he shoots his mouth off."

There was a non-pregnant pause before Paul continued. "All of that being said, do work out a plan for your ships and those of your competitors. You know what one of the problems is now; you know how widespread it is; and it's up to all of you to band together."

Dole scrunched up his mouth. "I hope all of us can cooperate. The fact is, Paul, that some cruise lines try to discredit other ones. And the irony is that—more often than not—they work through the Mob to do so. It seems like organized crime is everywhere."

"I couldn't agree with you more. Now, moving along. This is an exercise that resembles one I participated in not too long ago. When one of your ships is scheduled to be in questionable waters—like off the coast of Somalia or in the Strait of Malacca—could you arrange to have a destroyer visible near your ship? A destroyer belonging to the nearest country? I doubt if they wouldn't cooperate because their citizens sail on cruise ships too. Or maybe you could have an arrangement set up where such a destroyer's country gets paid for that kind of protection.

"Even get together with your definite friends and form a safety organization, whereby any member cruise line can let the organization's headquarters know of its ships' upcoming locations and ... well, you get the picture. I'd also favor a website too. Call it *Safe Sailing.com*. The idea is to be prepared wherever and whenever."

"That's a blockbuster, Paul!" Dole exclaimed. "I get the idea. And who knows, once word gets around, maybe we'll attract our not-so-friendly cruise lines to join."

"And, speaking of word getting around," Paul kicked in, "after the pirates get hold of this, it may cut down on their piracy. If not eliminate it *entirely* in some areas."

"Well, I'd have to doubt that but it's a start—and a huge one."

Dole then nearly leaped off his chair to grab Paul's hand and shake it vigorously.

"Thank you, my friend … my *sincere* friend."

To Paul, it seemed preordained that the word "sincere" arose, for he had concluded there had been no lack of sincerity in Dole's shoulder.

Paul might have informed Oscar about his meeting with Dole but decided it best to wait till after another meeting he had planned. He declined the captain's invitation for lunch—mainly because he wasn't hungry—and drove back to Falmouth.

A few times during the drive, his vision became cloudy and he nearly pulled over to rest. But when he did pull over, it wasn't to rest but to phone Fabio Calderone in Calabria. It was another easy connection and all Paul could deduce was that fate was following him around.

"Fabio," he said, "it's Paul D'Arneau here. From the States."

"Paul!" was the reply. "Is everything alright? Are you well?"

"Yeah, as well as can be expected under the circumstances. Listen, I'm calling to ask if we could get together soon. Maybe you can improve

the circumstances for me. That possible if I come there?"

"No question. What have I always told you? Anytime, any place. When do you have in mind?"

Paul's eyes cleared as he opted for the next day, then asked where.

Fabio's answer was immediate. "Let's make it at poor old Rocco Stratta's barber shop. Since he died, it's been unoccupied and I still have a key. Care to give me a clue why or do you want to wait?"

"Wait. I just don't trust these phone lines."

They agreed to a meeting at the shop—3 p.m. Calabria time.

After having trouble replacing the phone's receiver, Paul realized he was bone tired. Tired of conversations. Thoughts. People in general. But he'd traveled this route before and understood when the need for rest came calling.

The phone rang and he was tempted not to answer it. He did, however, once he thought it could be Sylvie.

He recognized the surly voice of Louis Levesque from the *Aquatic Sonata*.

Ignoring an introduction, Levesque said: "I hear you're circulating bad things about me all over the place."

Though foggy, Paul responded, "Yeah, you're just a bad guy, Levesque. And a bum."

"That's bullshit, and you'd better start taking back your remarks."

Paul could feel blood well up in his face and neck. He needed a sizable degree of self-restraint to go along with his next comment. "What is it they say? 'No way José'?"

"Then be ready for drastic measures."

"You, too."

"Then both of us together."

Suddenly Paul's words came easier. "You sound like one of those New Kamikazis."

"We share the same philosophy. Think about your loved ones, too."

"I only have one loved one, bum."

The phone obviously went dead, but Paul still repeated the word "bum".

He chalked up the call to just another instance of a loud-mouthed four flusher who lost out and who would probably disappear somewhere.

After that he did manage to nap for a few hours.

Later, when Sylvie returned home, he apprised her of the conversation with Dole and the upcoming meeting with Fabio. Against his better judgment, he next told her about the call from Levesque but eliminated the reference to "loved

ones". Instead he said, "So this bum may resort to anything, but I doubt it. He's finished."

Paul pulled her close before continuing. "Stay alert, Syl." He then stretched her out to an arm's length away. "And come to think of it, do you keep your office door locked?"

"When I'm working, no. When I leave for the day, yes."

"Ever consider keeping it locked even when you're there?"

"No, that would be too confusing."

"Confusing but safer. Think about it."

"I will, but what's with this Fabio?"

"Simple. Basically we need an informant."

"What's *that* mean?"

"Someone who can find out when the day before Sarin Day is. Then Saltanban can verify it and our histarians can swing into action."

"And Fabio is trustworthy?"

"Let me tell you. Of all the mobsters I've had to work with, only one was as trustworthy and equal to the now dead Rocco Stratta in terms of knowing the most landscapes—both law abiding and criminal. And that's Fabio. He's never double-crossed anyone to my knowledge. But I've known a few who wouldn't hesitate, including Gino and Sal. Either one could've been who Oscar Levant was

referring to when he said, 'I'll double-cross that bridge when I come to it'."

It provided a welcome laugh before she said, "You can't use the phone to talk with Fabio?"

"I don't trust the phones when it comes to Sarin Day. I didn't with Rocco and I won't now with Fabio. Besides, I need to *see* his reaction, just like I did with Rocco."

During a light dinner, she kept pressing him on Fabio's reliability.

Eventually, he arrived at the best way to phrase it. "It's just like good pirates and bad pirates. There are decent mobsters and dangerous ones."

"Decent mobsters?"

"Well, the decent ones won't hurt us."

Chapter 18

The door to Rocco's barber shop was unlocked and Paul marched right in, determined to win over Fabio's cooperation.

Inside, nothing had changed since he was there five days before. Fabio was seated in one of the two customer chairs, checking what appeared to be a pocket calendar. The calendar dropped from his hands and onto the floor as he leaped to his feet and shook Paul's hand with great energy. They practically bumped heads as each bent over to retrieve the calendar. It provided a loud mutual laugh and, in Paul's opinion, a good way to begin their talk.

"I hope we're laughing when we get through," he said.

"It's that bad?"

"No, not bad, but maybe complicated."

Fabio was about fifty and, in both build and looks, appeared amazingly like the late James Gandolfini of *The Soprano's* fame. He had a small graying beard and an arresting smile, one that would doubtless evoke similar smiles in a room full of people.

Like Rocco, he also had lived for a time in the United States—Philadelphia—and during three summers, took English courses at Temple University. He'd hoped to become a U.S. citizen but several distant relatives lured him back to Calabria.

He worked as a meat packer in a neighboring town and Paul remembered well when they often talked there, Fabio's arm invariably resting on a hanging carcass.

They sat in the customers' chairs, each swiveled around to face one another.

Paul began by asking if Gino and Sal knew of this meeting.

"No, I almost told them but then figured I'd better not—that maybe you'd want it to be a secret."

"*Definitely* a secret."

"See, I know your mind. Probably better than most people."

"Other than my Sylvie."

"Other then your Sylvie—of course."

"Speaking of people," Paul said, "do you know or have you heard of a fellow named Juan Carlos Saltanban and one named Shoko Asahara?"

"Saltanban? The one over in Gibraltar? I once had to contact him about some mutual business in the electronic area. Seems friendly."

"Yeah. Well, eventually he'll be key for us. But I'll get to him in a minute. And what about Asahara?"

"He was the mastermind of that Sarin attack in Tokyo some years ago."

"Right." Paul was never surprised at Fabio's knowledge of people, places and things. *He's probably already aware of Sarin Day.*

"So now to the main reasons I've come here, Fabio—my good old friend. Asahara is determined to end the world and is planning to release sarin again. But this time in seven continents, simultaneously. At least I *think* he's the one who's running the show."

"Here are the seven continents." Paul read from his writing pad. "Africa, Americas, Antarctica, Asia, Australia, Europe, Oceania. I presume that since they plan on using pirates—that's what I've been told—we'd better know the waterways they'll be on. I mean for each of the

continents. And even who's calling the shots in each one—who the leaders are."

Fabio started scribbling on the back of his calendar.

Paul next said, "You wouldn't mind if I just stop here and there to ask if you could help me regarding the subject I'm covering at the time?"

"No, I like it that way, my good old friend."

"Okay—three things. Number one is: could you find out if it's definitely Asahara who's running the show? Incidentally, we're calling the show *Sarin Day.*"

Fabio nodded and kept scribbling.

"Number two. We have to know precisely the date of their planned attack because the day before, we'll have people ready to dispose of the seven leaders in each of the continents. So if you can find out who the leaders are, I'd appreciate it.

"And this is where Saltanban comes in. As you probably know, he's an expert in telecommunications and cybernetics and he's developed a machine that can verify practically anything. I've seen it and it's impressive. What he'll do for us is verify that the day before their planned attack is legitimate and not something to throw us off. Also he'll somehow verify the names of the seven continent leaders. Not to say, Fabio, that

you'd be giving false information, but since this is such a delicate undertaking ..."

"I understand and I like your thoroughness, Paul. You haven't changed."

"Well, timing and thoroughness are absolutely crucial—or we all go down the tube. If we're off by just twenty-four hours, it's ruination time. If we're too early, we'll be doing things for nothing and they'll just carry on. If we plan on twenty-four hours later ... well, we'll never even get there. We'll be cooked. I mean literally. *All* of us."

Fabio looked up, his face a picture of both concern and confidence. "Understood," he said.

"And last: could you call off the Mob regarding cruise ships, pirates and prostitution?"

Fabio didn't go back to scribbling, and Paul could feel a premature systole in his chest. *Oh, boy. He can't do it all.*

But Fabio licked the end of his pencil and said. "What's next?"

"That's it. That's plenty. We'd really appreciate it."

"No problem. I'll do what I can do and, as of now anyway, I think you'll be happy."

Fabio slid partly off his chair, grabbed hold of Paul's wrist and said, "I'll never ... ever ... forget the things you've done for me over the years.

This … or these … are the least I can do for you." They nodded in unison.

Fabio slid back and said, "Two questions: how much time do I have? And who's the 'we'?"

He picked up the "we". So sharp, this guy!

"The best I can say is one to two weeks. As for the 'we', it's me and the man who hired me in the first place. To do less than I'm doing, incidentally. But what the hell, it's to help us survive."

Paul then opened up about Oscar Blackstone; *Emerald Research*; Frederick Dole and his cruise line; Marlene and the questionable jewelry box; Velda and the pirates; prostitution in general; Levesque and Tomi; and the whole story of Evita. All his challenges, in effect.

When bringing up Marlene's name, he referred to her as "Marlene the Diamond Queen."

"Rhymes," Fabio said.

Paul hadn't thought of it that way, but since it was mentioned, he decided to improve on it.

"Maybe it should be, 'Don't be seen with Marlene the Diamond Queen'."

"I like it," Fabio said.

"You started it, and you're next," Paul responded.

"Okay. How about 'It's keen not to be seen with Marlene the Diamond Queen'? Now, you're next."

"I give up."

Jostling around like that made Paul feel a bit more secure in the presence of a key mobster.

Their last discussion involved the New Kamakazis and whether or not they'd have a role in the execution of Sarin Day. Paul said he doubted it.

Fabio smiled and said, "Make that number four, and I'll phone you with my results as soon as possible. You'll hear from me with most of them in forty-eight hours."

Forty-eight hours? Unreal!

"Excellent. But please don't mention specific names or Sarin Day on the phone. Which reminds me ..."

Paul withdrew two phone numbers from his satchel—the numbers Saltanban had given him—and tore off the bottom one. He handed it to Fabio, after explaining why Juan had devised it.

"Only for *your* use, Fabio," he said. "I'll be at the other end."

Chapter 19

Back home again, Paul felt somewhat relieved. But still adrift. He thought of it as "funny relieved". He was still embroiled in the adventure of his life. Yet, having Fabio on his side, some of its burdens were being shared. At least he hoped so.

Time will tell.

It was around ten p.m. on Thursday and Sylvie was in bed but still awake, reading. Paul had come into the house quietly and paused at the bedroom door.

"I'm here," he said. "Do I have the right house?"

She sprung up to a sitting position, exclaiming, "Darling! I worried so much this time."

She extended her arms for an embrace and began another sentence but couldn't finish it because Paul was on her, kissing her lips and her closed eyes.

She eased away and said, "I don't know. Maybe it's your meeting with a known mobster. And even though you say you've become friends, you never gave me any details. And here we are. But how did it go?"

"Fantastic! He agreed to everything, so now we just wait. It's like I have less weight on my shoulders."

Sylvie got out of bed, took Paul by the hand and led him along the top railing.

"Where are we going, may I ask?" he said.

"The kitchen."

There, on the table, was a lemon meringue pie.

"My yearly surprise for you," she said. "You'd get too fat if I made it more often."

His grin was as wide as his bear hug was tight. He then went for some plates while she got knives, forks and the lemonade. Next to milk, it was his favorite.

While eating she said, "My next surprise is maybe something we haven't thought about in years."

"And that is?"

"Visiting the arboretum down at Connecticut College."

"In New London? Ah, such fond memories. The botanical gardens there are unbeatable. What a great idea!"

He wiped away some crumbs from his lap before adding, "You know, Syl, I've let my study of arboretums slip and I shouldn't have."

"But there's only so much you can do, dear. Are you willing to make the trip? It's less than two hours from here. And maybe it's a perfect tonic for you."

She's right. I need it. But not now.

He prayed he wasn't counting on Fabio too much, but believed that a break in the action was too premature. He could picture himself walking along the arboretum's trails but not taking much in, his mind elsewhere.

Bottom line? He would stick close to home for now. Then after the final push—if all goes well—it *could* be arboretum time.

He rose and circled around to Sylvie's side.

She had scrutinized his expression and now took hold of his hand and said, "I know your answer. And I understand it. Only do relax if you can. Okay?"

"Okay."

He leaned over and whispered in her ear: "It's something to look forward to. It'll do us *both* good."

Bright and early the following morning, he phoned Oscar. He had spoken to him two mornings before but was now anxious to ferret out his preliminary conclusions. At last.

He started with the jewelry box. "Marlene said there was no such box and even if there had been one, it's gone now." Challenge #1 sprung up in his mind's eye.

Before he had a chance to continue, Oscar spoke up.

"You know, I've been uncomfortable, Paul—and I've got to get something off my chest before you continue. Regarding the Sarin Day plans you told me about on Wednesday? Well, I can't help but think it's more important than all the other things combined. I mean what you've been commissioned for. And for obvious reasons. I'm not a religious person, but for the sake of all mankind, I'll be praying every day."

There was a brief pause.

"It really makes everything else pale by comparison, but assuming you're successful, what more can you report on?" Oscar queried. "Piracy?

Prostitution? Perónism? The underworld? How they're all related?"

"That about sums it up. It's what you commissioned me for. I covered the jewelry box and I'll tell you what I've learned about those other things. First, piracy. I've been in touch with Frederick Dole of an American major cruise line. Pretty influential fellow. And I gave him some recommendations regarding piracy on the high seas. He took to them favorably and even assured me that bad piracy would hereafter go down. Can't do better than that, I'm afraid."

"Better than I thought, Paul. It's been around for a long time, so any dent is a huge dent."

Paul liked what the responses were so far and tackled the next subject with confidence.

"The next thing is prostitution. I can't eliminate it but I *can* say that Marlene seems to be toning down her involvement. And probably Velda, too. Remember what I told you about her going aboard cruise ships for you-know-what?"

He didn't wait for an answer.

"Well, that will stop because of the talk I had with Fred Dole. And that leaves Perónism and the underworld. Marlene and Perónism can be thought of as going hand-in-hand. She claims she wants to be another Evita, if you can believe it. As

for the underworld, here's just a small example of how they operate."

Paul then outlined the whole Velda/Rio de la Plata/ Mob scenario, stressing:

(1) "Harbor whoring"

(2) Ransom diamonds from cruise ships, and

(3) The role of mobsters in the entire operation.

"Anyway, Oscar, that about covers it, and I hope you can see how they're all interconnected. So do notify all the police officials and political leaders who've been hounding you and relay this information to them."

Despite the ensuing silence, Paul hoped that Oscar was nodding in the affirmative.

"Paul," he finally said, "I've got to hand it to you. That's about as complete a job as I could have expected. Congratulations!"

"Thank you. And now I can devote my attention to Sarin Day. Wish me luck."

"I certainly do. In full measure."

"And one last thing, Oscar. I've had to make contact with one of my mob friends—yes, I have some, but I'm not one of them. His name is Fabio and I trust him completely. We go back eons. He doesn't want the world to end either, so he's willing to work with me on the Sarin thing. Trying to find out who's calling the shots, the exact date the

bastards plan to strike, who any leaders are, and so forth. I thought you might want to stash his name away for the time being."

Chapter 20

Paul's phone rang at about three on Saturday. It was Fabio.

"Right on the money," Paul said. "Forty-eight hours. You're calling on the cryptic line?"

"Yes, as you said to. Is this a good time? It may take awhile."

"Yeah, Sylvie's gone to her office and I'm alone, itching to hear how you made out."

"I made out fine. I have just about all you wanted."

"In only two days?"

"I worked on it plenty and have all but one thing. That'll take a little more time."

"Which is?"

"Let me precede it by saying ... are you ready for this?"

"Of course."

"Your pal, Asahara?"

"Not my pal, but go ahead."

"He's been killed."

"Killed? How? Who?" Paul spilled some of the coffee he'd been drinking.

"One of the Kamakazis. Rammed into him with a scooter. His head was split open at the edge of a sidewalk. He didn't see the scooter coming. Blind, you know."

"I can't believe it! This changes everything."

"No, it doesn't ... or shouldn't. I found out he wasn't in charge of Sarin Day after all."

"Not in charge? Who is then?"

"I don't know yet. That's the one thing I haven't found out, but I'm working on it."

Asahara finally eliminated. Not with a gun, or a knife, or even of natural causes. But with a scooter! Any meaning?

It took nearly a minute for Paul to compose himself. He had asked for the time and Fabio said he would understand.

Paul returned to the conversation. "So that's that. Let's move on. What next?"

"As I said, in a few days I'll have the name of the one who *is* in charge. One thing I do know:

Asahara never was. Someone else was and still is. I was promised the answer, even if it's after Sarin Day—unless, of course, they're successful."

Paul couldn't bear the thought of their being successful. "You've got the day pinpointed?"

"Yes, the date is August 20. That's this coming Thursday. I even have the exact hour: seven a.m., U.S. time. So *your* key day is Wednesday."

"Wednesday! That's three-and-a-half days from now!"

"Yes, it is. But that still gives you plenty of time to mobilize your forces, Paul."

"Christ, I should ask to be excused for another minute, but I have to ask you. How do you get your information, or is it a secret?"

"A secret to the masses, but not to you. It's a matter of connections and contacts."

"What's the difference?"

"Connections involve those we work with all the time. We really know each other well. Contacts are those we don't really know, but they can be trusted. Just as we can be in their dealings with us. Out of Japan, for example. Then we have our system of intermediaries. They get paid to … to facilitate … I guess that's the best word … to facilitate what goes on between our connections

and our contacts. I know it sounds complicated but because we go this route so often, it's not."

"They all can be trusted, then?"

"Yes, or else."

"Or else what?"

"Let's just say they know what they would be getting into. Or their families. Or both."

"Don't you have rival gangs, though? I've heard of them."

"Plenty. But we keep our distance from one another. That keeps the bloodshed down."

Paul elected not to continue with the questions but, reassured over the answers, did end with a conclusion. "So the whole setup is like one big cryptic line."

"That's about it. A cryptic line no one dares to cross."

Paul realized he couldn't stop clamping and unclamping his teeth, so he took hold of a cracker from the pile on his desk and bit off a small piece—small enough to continue talking.

"Okay," he said, "were you able to find out who the seven leaders are?"

"Yes—their names; and their continents; and their waterways, because they'd use pirates; and their countries. This is the part I was referring to when I said it would take some time, so I hope you have it. I'll read the list before me. It's more

confidential this way rather than by computers. Too much plagiarism and way too many hackers at work."

"I agree, so let's take our time here. Incidentally, in gathering up this information, didn't you feel that someone might have been listening in? Someone who might've been up to no good?"

"Always. But we've got ways to code everything. I forgot to mention that before. Connections, contacts, intermediaries and coding."

"Good enough. So go ahead, Fabio. I've got plenty of paper on my desk here."

What followed was a list of the seven continents, the leader's names, their countries and the waterways involved. Fabio enumerated them slowly and it took Paul fifteen minutes to write everything down, word-for-word—then another ten to double-check each of the seven and their particulars:

Africa. Manuel Rodrigues. Mozambique. Mozambique Channel.
Americas. Ciro Valdez. Cuba. Caribbean Sea.
Antarctica. Henryk Beacham. Cape Adare. Ross Sea.
Asia. Kyoshi Ishiguro. Japan. Sea of Japan.
Australia. Maxwell Cook. Australia. Tasman Sea.

Europe. Uberto Chiopetta. "I know him personally". Italy. Mediterranean Sea.

Oceania. Emil Jahne. New Guinea. Solomon Sea.

"Good job," Paul said. He then thought it advisable to remind Fabio that the seven histarians know who the good pirates are and who the bad ones are. Also, that five histarians would be assigned to killing each leader, either in his country or on his waterway. And, most important of all: the whole counterattack would define the word "precision".

He was mentally tired by now but wanted to complete all aspects of Fabio's undertaking. Paul learned that a massive segment of the New Kamakazis would be part of the strike in a non-specific capacity. And that, yes, the Mob was called off of anything to do with cruise ship irregularities.

"It's a done deal," Fabio said, "and that Velda babe should be apprehended. You'd be shocked at how many ship captains know of her exploits."

"I can believe it. I guess it's been a matter of minimizing crew fights."

Paul then brought up Saltanban's role, with the reminder that he would be providing him with

the aforementioned list for verification, along with Wednesday's date and time.

Fabio, in turn, asked Paul to be patient about learning the name of Sarin Day's mastermind. "It might not be anyone familiar to you," Fabio said.

"But, then again, it might."

"Anyway, until the next call, Paul, stay loose."

Sylvie arrived home soon after Paul had hung up and fixed another cup of coffee. He told her everything he could remember about the call and she offered no advice but showed plenty of distress in a strained face.

Chapter 21

It was six-thirty a.m. when Paul stirred in bed. He opened his eyes and thought he saw *Wednesday, August 19* plastered on the ceiling above him. At Sylvie's suggestion twelve hours before, he'd decided to wipe away the immediate past and the immediate future from his mind. For obvious reasons. But now, he had to plan, plan, and implement.

It was too early to call those he wanted to congregate at Sylvie's office at Wood's Hole. He'd selected that location after hearing, the night before, that the communications glitch had been eliminated.

"As private as it can be," she had said.

Paul showered, shaved and mostly stirred some cereal and fingered some toast. But he did drink his coffee—two cups. He waited until seven-thirty and within ten minutes had called all he'd intended to and received positive responses from them all. The reason for each call was disguised, as were the questions that, nonetheless, had been appropriate and numerous. He felt they helped him plod through the maze before him.

He had contacted David, Vincent, Oscar, Fred and Gomez. They would convene at six p.m.—which would give Gomez sufficient time to fly from Buenos Aires. So, including Paul and Sylvie, seven people would call the shots while, supposedly, one person—as yet unknown—would constitute the opposition.

Immediately on the heels of these arrangements, he phoned Saltanban and passed on all the information given to him by Fabio, including the date of Sarin Day and what he now labeled the "Continent List". Juan seemed delighted, both over the prospect of saving the universe and the use of his completed Synchronous Action Device.

Paul informed him of the upcoming conference and its members; indicated that he would be called as necessary; and asked him to go

ahead and verify everything that required verification.

"I'll get to it immediately, and I'll check periodically to make sure they haven't changed their plans. The closer we get to 'the' day, the more often I'll check. You can be sure of that."

They arrived at Sylvie's office almost simultaneously. Paul noticed a sparkling new Visaplex two-way intercom apparatus at the corner of her desk. Their eyes met in mutual understanding.

After rounds of handshakes and hugs, the group arranged seven straight-backed chairs in a circle and sat down.

"Okay, folks," Paul said. He lifted his hand and all chitchat promptly stopped. "Thank you for coming. With your permission, I'd like to start with a prayer."

Each nodded, so he took out a well-worn tablet from his satchel. After they joined hands and bowed, he read:

> Assist us mercifully, O Lord, in these our supplications and prayers, and dispose the way of *thy* servants toward the attainment of everlasting salvation; that, among all the changes and chances of this

mortal life, they may ever be defended by *thy* gracious and ready help. *Amen.*

They all repeated the *Amen* and Paul returned the tablet to his satchel only to withdraw a small stack of cards, each bearing names of the seven continents, names of the seven opposition leaders, their countries of origin and the likely waterways they might operate from. He stressed the fact that the use or nonuse of pirates would dictate whether or not the waterways would come into play.

Vincent was sitting with one leg crossed over the other. A fly alighted on his shoe. Without missing a beat, Paul said, "See that fly on Vincent's shoe? It's not moving and he's not moving. It's steady as they go, and that's got to apply to us."

"And the fly," Vincent said as he brushed it away. They all laughed.

"Okay now," Paul said, "this won't take long but let's get serious, shall we?" He slapped the tablet with the back of his hand and stated, "Right here is a list compiled by a friend of mine, Fabio Calderone from Italy, and I'll get to it in a minute. But first let me tell you about Fabio. I think I've spoken to each one of you about him before. Believe me, he can be trusted. He's on our side. He doesn't want to die either. He'd do nearly anything

for me, and if you add in the dying part, he's ... well ... like one of us."

Hearing no comments from the others, Paul went ahead with the details of his most recent conversation with Fabio, and with the responsibility of thirty-five histarians who were awaiting further instructions.

"You all know about histarians, so I don't need to go into that. And you all know that I've alerted them as to their role in our counterattack. It's a counterattack that must take place with absolute adherence to the letter. With absolute precision. Not a second gained or lost at each location. Otherwise, they ... we ... the whole universe ... might ... pow! Cease to exist. Here's the schedule then: today's Sunday. We make our calls tomorrow, Monday. Some time differences have to be taken into consideration. You all let me know how it went by the next day, Tuesday. And the simultaneous killings happen on Wednesday. Meanwhile, Saltanban will be doing his checking."

The first question then arose—from Oscar. "Who will contact the histarians with the exact time they must swing into action?" he asked.

"There are thirty-five of them," Paul replied. "I think the best thing to do is divvy it all up, and I have. There wouldn't be much to say. In fact, that's a *good* thing, considering the whole idea of

secrecy. Just mentioning the exact time will suffice. What I can do is call each of them individually and give out my cryptic number. Then they can call me back, as I've said. And if anyone is listening in by any manner or means, and he dares to phone me, I can tell if he's an histarian or not. I know just about all of them."

Paul didn't expect the room to erupt in applause as it did, and he almost rose to take a bow.

This was the moment, he believed—but didn't say—that all that could be done regarding secrecy *had* been done. And that he wouldn't modify any part of what he had planned because of the possibility of anyone somehow monitoring phone calls. In fact, he relegated the secrecy issue to the lowest of levels.

We don't have a perfect setting. There may be flaws. We ***can*** *be found out. It's the chance we have to take, for there is no other route.*

He then produced another stack of cards. Each was headed with a name—Sylvie, Oscar, David, Vincent, Fred, Gomez and Paul— and the necessary information below. They studied the cards, lips tight, foreheads furrowed. Sylvie peered over at the cards on either side of her, then looked back at hers.

"The men have all the histarian names to study and I don't see where I have any," she said.

"Is it because I'm a woman?" She obviously had her tongue in her cheek.

Paul responded, "No, it's not because you're a woman. It's because you're the one who'll be busy fetching us some coffee or tea over there." He pointed to the hotplate, cups, saucers, coffee and tea pots on the corner table. "And you're kidding, aren't you? But we can use the fun. Fact is, you misread the cards, dear. You *do* have your five."

Sylvie dutifully headed for the table while acknowledging the applause.

More questions followed. "When should we meet again?" David asked.

"I doubt we'll have to, but let's leave it on a p.r.n. basis, as you doctors say. Uh … 'as needed', David."

Paul looked over at Gomez. "Joe," he said, "if we *do* meet again, you needn't make the trip from Buenos Aires. We can discuss things by phone." It was the first time Paul didn't hesitate about mentioning the discussion of sensitive information that way.

"No, no—I'll make the trip," Gomez said.

A third round of applause drowned out five comments of appreciation.

"Clapping, clapping," Paul said. He crossed his fingers and followed with, "Boy, I hope there's

more and more of it on you-know-what day. God help us."

He had been noticing Dole fidgeting in his chair and finally addressed him. "Fred, you look nervous. What's up?"

"Well, believe me, I'm not complaining, but couldn't we have done all this over the telephone?"

"Sure, but face-to-face in our first go-around has more impact. More … you know … *tener la impresión*. You ought to know that, Fred. Don't you meet with your captains sometimes? Couldn't you just phone them?"

"Sorry," Dole said, as if he'd been discovered at the cookie jar. "Just curious, and you're absolutely on the mark."

"Speaking of 'mark'," Paul said, "let's mark our calendars for the 19th as the day before and the 20th for the day itself. Thanks again, good luck, and let's agree that you make your calls by this time tomorrow. Not that I'd be checking on you, but I must keep track, so do call me when you're finished. Now for the coffee or tea."

A half hour later, their goodbyes completed, Oscar approached Paul at the door. He shook his card before him and said, "I hired *you* but now you have *me* doing some of the work. A paradox, or what?" The touch of a smile was playful.

Paul smiled back, saying, "But remember, Sarin Day wasn't part of the deal. And besides, you've been around and that's the sorta guy we need. Especially for the continent I gave you. It's the toughest."

"You think so? Why's that?"

"Asia? Japan? That's where Asahara was from. And the New Kamakazis—that's where they're from."

"But I'll only be making contact with the histarians there."

"You're right. I'm only teasing, Oscar."

When Paul was alone with Sylvie, he said, "I sensed an air of confidence in the room, didn't you?"

"I sure did, and you were something special."

"Special? How so?"

"Oh, the way you run a meeting."

"Lot's of practice, but thanks."

"You're welcome, and here's hoping confidence is a good omen."

Paul put his arm around her waist and said, "Was it too brief?"

"The meeting?"

"Yeah, the conference."

"Not at all. How many ways can you say it? They know the stakes and what they have to do."

"So do we."

Chapter 22

Monday morning was autumn in the summer. And a dismal autumn at that, with howling winds, drizzle and a temperature that no doubt set a record.

It matched Paul's disposition as he stirred his morning tea, glad that Sylvie had left for work and hadn't noticed how discombobulated he looked. He had checked himself in the mirror and saw a man who'd aged, who had a few more gray hairs, and who probably wouldn't change if he were to shave. So he didn't.

He hoped he had distributed the continent assignments in the best possible manner and referred to yet another card. He poured over it:

Sylvie: Caribbean Sea
Vincent: Antarctica
Oscar: Asia
Fred: Australia
David: Oceania
Gomez: Africa
Paul: Europe

The best for everyone and every location? *But what difference does it make?* He recalled Oscar's take on it—"An histarian is an histarian, no matter the territory"—and told himself that the allocation was just fine. It wasn't as if they had to pay the continent a visit, or sail the waterways, or say hello to the likes of Henryk Beacham or Kyoshi Ishiguro. He dropped any doubts.

The phone rang and he answered it, although he didn't feel like it. It was Fabio calling. Suddenly he felt like it and ran his hand over his stubble.

"That was fast," he said. "Less than forty-eight hours this time, though there was less to do."

"But harder. Are you well rested and sitting down?"

Now what?

"I'm sitting down."

"Guess who's running the show and has been right along."

"I have no idea. Do I know him?"

"Not him but her. Marlene the Diamond Queen."

"Ma ... Marlene? Marlene Kesler?" Paul once again had trouble swallowing. "I can't believe it! You're sure?"

"Yes. I've had four men on the case. That's twice the number I usually count on. Each came up with the same person. And they came up with some other things. That Kamakazi guy who ran over Asahara?"

"Yeah."

"He was definitely a hit man hired by Marlene. She and the Kamakazis are great friends. She served them plenty. In the case of Asahara, she said she had to strike first because she found out he had it 'in' for her."

"But why does she want to die and take the rest of the world with her?"

"Because she's ashamed of her past behavior and that of her friends, like the Velda gal. Says that whoring is widespread and she grew to despise it. It got worse the more she researched Evita who, she said, did less whoring than she did. She kept telling people that Evita wouldn't have been proud of her."

For some time now, Paul had hypothesized that Marlene was mentally unstable—crazy—and these revelations simply strengthened the thought.

"She's got to be put away, damn it!"

"No, not yet. Paul. Here's what I think. If she's arrested now, somehow she may upset Sarin Day. I don't know how exactly. She might arrange to have it happen earlier. I do know she has two deputies below her for this—both Kamakazis. I have their names here: Misao Kume and Joji Iwata. One of them, Kume, slept with her frequently. The other, his friend Iwata, never did and was virtually ignored by Marlene. Fortunately, it was Iwata who came forth and indicated her leadership role. And he said he was willing to testify against her in a court of law—anywhere, any time.

"So the conclusion must be that since your committee is in place and ready to act, I wouldn't ask Gomez to apprehend Marlene until *after* Sarin Day. Assuming it's unsuccessful."

Chapter 23

Paul made his calls later on Monday, as did Sylvie. He had told her about Fabio's latest revelation and she had reacted in much the same manner as he had.

For all of that day and the following—Tuesday—when he wasn't calling or receiving scattered calls from other committee members, he was pacing. When he wasn't checking with Saltanban, he was munching.

Neither Paul nor Sylvie managed to sleep much. Or even eat more than a salad. She spilled an entire bottle of *Sweet Vidalia Onion* dressing, which rolled to the side of their refrigerator, and Paul pulled a back muscle in retrieving it.

Near the end of Tuesday, he decided to read extractions from an essay the Dalai Lama had given him. He remembered the occasion well. He'd been so stressed out by the demands of an assignment confined to India, Nepal and surrounding regions, that he could hardly eat any of the Tibetan staples—its noodles, yak, mutton, dumplings or cheese.

He removed the watered-down essay from his satchel.

Will this be the last time I ever retrieve something from here?

The essay was originally published in the Hindustan Times, India on January 3rd, 2011:

> If the situation or problem is such that it can be remedied, then there is no need to worry about it. In other words, if there is a solution or a way out of the difficulty, you do not need to be overwhelmed by it. Then it is clearly more sensible to spend your energy focusing on the solution rather then worrying about the problem. Alternatively, if there is no solution, no possibility of resolution, then there is also no point in being worried about it, because you cannot do anything about it anyway. In that case, the sooner you accept this fact, the easier it

will be for you. This formula, of course, implies directly confronting the problem and taking a realistic view. Otherwise you will be unable to find out whether or not there is a resolution to the problem.

... We may sometimes feel that our whole lives are unsatisfactory. We feel on the point of being overwhelmed by the difficulties that confront us. This happens to us all in varying degrees from time to time. When this occurs, it is vital that we make every effort to find a way of lifting our spirits. We can do this by recollecting our good fortunes. We may, for example, be loved by someone; we may have certain talents; we may have received a good education; we may have our basic needs provided for—food to eat, cloths to wear, somewhere to live. We may have performed certain altruistic deeds in the past. We must take into consideration even the slightest positive aspects of our lives. For if we fail to find some way of lifting ourselves, there is every danger of sinking further into our sense of powerlessness. This can lead us to believe that we have no capacity for doing good whatsoever. Thus we create the conditions of despair itself.

> As a Buddhist monk, I have learned that what principally upsets our inner peace is what we call disturbing emotions. All those thoughts, emotions, and mental events that reflect a negative or uncompassionate state of mind inevitably undermine our experience of inner peace. All our negative thoughts and emotions—such as hatred, anger, pride, lust, greed, envy, and so on—are considered to be sources of difficulty, to be disturbing. Negative thoughts and emotions are what obstruct … one of our most basic aspirations—to avoid suffering.
>
> A great Tibetan teacher of mind training once remarked that one of the mind's most marvelous qualities is that it can be transformed. I have no doubt that those who attempt to transform their minds … will notice a change in their mental attitudes and responses to people and events. Their minds will become more disciplined and positive.

Reading the article helped Paul some. He would stop counting the minutes and await the results.

On Thursday, noon arrived, the sun was shining, and nothing had happened.

Epilogue

That very afternoon, Paul phoned all the committee members to inform them that everything had gone as planned, that the coast was clear, and that they should go on with their lives. He thanked each one while practically kissing the mouthpiece.

Down in Buenos Aires, Captain Gomez somehow rounded up Marlene and Velda. They were taken into custody on suspicion of murder and plotting to end the world with sarin gas.

Kamakasi Joji Iwata told Fabio who, in turn, told Paul that he would gladly testify against them both. But the authorities sidestepped any criminal trial in favor of committing them to the El Borda Psychiatric Hospital.

Oscar said he had another assignment for Paul but would let him recuperate for awhile.

Dole became busy implementing all Paul's suggestions about piracy.

Vincent returned to his teaching duties at Harvard and made up for lost time.

David began assisting in a multiple homicide investigation in Los Angeles.

Saltanban started work on a new device, which he claimed would revolutionize the electronics industry.

Fabio continued with his meatpacking and intermittent mob activity.

And Paul and Sylvie? They took a few days off to visit Connecticut's Mystic Seaport and finally to roam the spacious arboretum at Connecticut College.

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